

-CHAPTER ONE-

SÍÐR:

CUSTOMS AND CONDUCT

The term síðr can be roughly translated as both "religion" and "custom", referring to the body of unwritten customs that largely govern the way people interact with one another, both on an individual level and in larger social situations. It is thus similar to the archaic English term "thew" sometimes used by Anglo-Saxon Heathens to describe those social institutions and customs to which they subscribe. It includes a wide variety of such traditions, governing everything from the resolution of conflicts between individuals (including such things as the famous feuds that figure so prominently in the Icelandic Sagas) to the interaction between leaders and their followers. It is, in short, the means by which individuals deal with one another, and thus the foundation for society as a whole.

Originally, of course, such customs were not written down; they were simply the way people behaved. To behave otherwise was not exactly unthinkable, but definitely fraught with consequence both mundane and esoteric. There is some evidence to point to the idea that it was the peaceful

maintenance of such customs (regulated by the sacral kings in Scandinavia and collectively by the Alþing in Iceland) that led to the generation of "ar ok friðr" (prosperity and peace) on a mundane level, and the collective megin on an esoteric level. It could be said that siðr was the webbing upon which the wyrd of the community depended, much as the web of oaths forms the shape of one's individual wyrd.

Feud and Vengeance

As any casual reader of the Icelandic Sagas can relate, feud and the seeking of vengeance was central to the Icelandic mindset, both in Heathen times and after the conversion to Christianity. The various Eddaic poems concerning Sigurd, Völund, and so forth also demonstrate the centrality of vengeance for wrongs (real or imagined) to the Heathen mindset. This attitude is naturally carried forth in modern Heiðni as well (although naturally modern Heiðinjar don't go around killing people or burning down their houses; it is entirely possible for right retribution to be obtained within the context of modern civil law).

Perhaps nothing encapsulates the Heiðinn attitude towards revenge, and what sort of shrift enemies should receive, better

than the Words of the High One Himself:

A man should be loyal
through life to friends,
To them and to friends of theirs,
But never shall
a man make offer
Of friendship to his foes.

A man should be loyal
through life to friends,
And return gift for gift,
Laugh when they laugh,
but with lies repay
A false foe who lies.

(Hávamál 42-43)

The message is clear, and equally clearly the inverse of the Christian injunction; rather than treating others as we would wish to be treated, we Heiðinjar are enjoined, rather, to treat others as we ourselves have already been treated by those who have wronged us. Vengeance is not only my right, saith the Heathen, but my obligation.

The feuds that fuel the plot-fires of the Icelandic Sagas often

run for decades, sometimes even lasting for generations. There is much precedent for such among other Germanic cultures (or cultures heavily influenced by Germanic culture), ranging from the Hatfields and McCoys to centuries-old feuds between Scottish highlander clans that persist to this day.

The reasons that such a feud might be initiated and vengeance demanded were many and varied, but most often involved the slaying of one's kith or kin, or a slight upon one's honor. Many were, at their heart, motivated by political or economic power, sometimes using more honor-implicating incidents as an excuse.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that Old Norse has no word to equate to our modern term "feud". The state of affairs where various factions were constantly at odds, sometimes coming to violence, exacting revenge for past wrongs, was just so normal that no special term was needed to describe it. It is quite a telling comment on the Heiðinn mindset.

Modern practice varies little from that of the ancients. The holding of grudges and the seeking of revenge for insults and injuries, while perhaps not Politically Correct, are nonetheless perfectly acceptable and indeed expected behaviors for the

contemporary Heiðinn.

Holmganga and Einvigi (Duels)

Historically, there were circumstances in which differences between two men could only be resolved through the conduct of a duel, sometimes to the death, other times not. Such duels took two forms; holmganga and einvigi. Einvigi is the less formalized form of the two, with no restrictions on weapons or locale, and with the only requirement being the marking out of the "dueling circle". Each participant holds his choice of weapons, and bears his own shield.

Holmganga, on the other hand, relies on a very complex and specific set of rules (reminiscent of modern fencing; for example, swords were of specific lengths and used only for slashing rather than thrusting), occurring after the issuance of a formal challenge, and taking place at a specific place and according to very specific rules, which were spelled out beforehand:

'I left my country because I wanted to seek fame; there are now two choices before me: the one to bravely get victory, though that is unlikely, in fighting against this man; the other is to fall with valor like a man, and that is

better than to live in shame and not dare to win honor for the king. I will fight against Kaldimar.' The king thanked him, and the laws of the holmganga were read. The champion had an excellent sword called Mæring. They fought hard and eagerly; at last the champion fell, but Björn received a severe wound; on this account he got great fame and honor from the king. (Björn Hitdoelakappi's Saga)

The field for the holmganga was defined with great detail, as were the weapons involved:

It was the law of the holmgang that the hide should be five ells long, with loops at its corners. Into these should be driven certain pins with heads to them, called tjosnur. He who made it ready should go to the pins in such a manner that he could see sky between his legs, holding the lobes of his ears and speaking the forewords used in the rite called "The Sacrifice of the tjosnur." Three squares should be marked round the hide, each one foot broad. At the outermost corners of the squares should be four poles, called hazels; when this is done, it is a hazelled field. (Kormaks Saga 10)

Bersi had a shield, and a long keen sword. Thorkel said, 'The sword which you wear, Bersi, is longer than the laws allow.' 'It shall not be so,' said Bersi, and brandishing Hviting with both hands he struck Thorkel his death blow.
(Kormaks Saga 14)

The fighting was very formalized, and seems to have involved a almost stylized ritual:

Each man must have three shields, and when these were made useless he must stand upon the cloak, even if he had walked out of it before, and thereafter defend himself with his weapons.

He who had been challenged was to strike first. If one was wounded so that blood came upon the cloak he was not obligated to fight any longer. If either stepped with one of his feet outside the hazel poles, it was held he had retreated; and if he stepped outside with both, he was held to have fled. One man was to hold the shield before each of the combatants. The one who had received most wounds was to pay as hólmlausn three marks of silver.

(Kormaks Saga 10)

Rather than engaging in an all-out melee, the first blow of the

fight was predetermined, with the challenger yielding the first blow to the person challenged:

'But I think that you know the difficulties in fighting me,' said Viking, 'and that you despair when you see me.'

Harek said, 'It is not so, and I must save your life, as you wanted to go into the open mouth of Hel; and give you the first blow, as is holmganga law, for I have challenged you, but I will stand still for you meanwhile, for I am not frightened that it will harm me.' (Thorstein Vikingson's Saga 4)

The length of the combat was flexible; it could end at the first shedding of blood, or proceed to the death:

Thorgils held the shield of his brother, and Thord Arndisarson that of Bersi, who struck the first blow and cleft Kormak's shield. Kormak struck at Bersi in the same way. Each of them spoiled three shields for the other.

Then Kormak had to strike; he struck, and Bersi parried with Hviting. Sköfnung cut off its point in front of the ridge, and the sword-point fell on Kormak's hand, and he was wounded in the thumb, whose joint was rent, and blood came on the cloak. Thereupon men intervened, and

did not want them to go on fighting. Kormak said, "It is little victory which Bersi has got from my accident, though we part now." (Kormaks Saga 10)

Ljót started to his feet, and Egil ran forward and at once struck at him. He went so close to him that he stepped back, and his shield did not cover him. Then Egil smote him above the knee, and cut off his leg. Ljót fell, and at once died. (Egils Saga 67)

To the victor went the spoils, and he who fell in the duel lost the agreed-upon amount:

It was the law of holmganga in those times, that if he who challenged another man in order to get something gained the victory, he should have the prize for which he had challenged; but if he was defeated, he should release himself with as much property as had been agreed upon; but if he fell in the holmganga he should forfeit all his property, and he who killed him was to take all the inheritance. (Egil's Saga 67)

The winner of the contest also had the honor of sacrificing a bull in thanks, marking the religious nature of the combat:

To the field was led forth a bull, large and old-'sacrificial

beast' such was termed-to be slain by him who won the victory. (Egil's Saga 68)

In modern practice, obviously a duel to the finish with deadly weapons is no longer to be tolerated. However, there do exist a number of suitable alternatives, which follow both the letter and spirit of the ancient custom. A wide variety of hand-to-hand combat arts are practiced today which would be suitable for the settlement of such disputes through *einvigi*. Too, much progress has been made in certain quarters regarding the development of relatively safe and controlled forms of sword and axe-fighting (see the "Suggested Resources" below for some details). It is certainly possible for the ancient forms to be respected even in the modern world.

Baugr and Outlawry

The process of the feud could theoretically be halted by the payment of *baugr* (*wergild*); a predetermined set of fines that, once paid, would absolve the payer of whatever wrongdoing had been perpetrated against one's kin. Thus, should one's brother be slain by someone in the next fjord, payment of *wergild* would suffice to make up for the deed, and obviate the need to repay one slaying with another. Entire lists of what

crime could be made up for by what amount of wergild were compiled, and although the amounts found in such legal works as Grágas are irrelevant to modern practice, they do shed light on the relative "value" of such crimes in the Heiðinn mindset. Certain crimes, however, were deemed to be beyond restitution through the payment of wergild; these are known as úbótamál, and those that commit such heinous acts are called níðings (evil wretches):

If a man attacks another in his house and breaks the house and slays him, that is called níðing-slaying.

It is a níðing-slaying if a man slays the one to whom he has given his plighted faith.

It is also a níðing-slaying if a man slays another during a truce.

If a man strikes another against a stone, or a timber, or a stump.

To burn a man in his house.

To plunder the slain, or take away a man's clothes and weapons.

To murder a man.

To avenge thieves. These things must be denied with

séttareid. Wherever a man commits a níðing-slaying, he is an unholy outlaw and forfeits every penny of his property, both land and movable property; he shall never come to the country, or the king, or the jarl, unless he brings true war-news. (Gulathing's Law 178)

It is also a níðing-slaying if anyone slays a lawman who is ordained to tell people the law. That man strikes down the rights of all men, for the lawman has duties to all, rich and poor, where he rules ... Men who are found to be so deceitful as to run away with other men's wives are úbótamaðr. (Gulathing's Law 160)

If, for whatever reason, a man failed to pay the weregild for a crime, he was considered an outlaw. Such men were deemed a varg i véum ("wolf in the sanctuary") or skógar-man ("forest-man"). They were literally outside the bounds (that is, protection) of the law, and could be slain on sight.

It might also be of interest, in today's modern world of Internet communications and electronic mail, that to insult someone, verbally or in writing, was also cause for outlawry:

No man shall make tungunið (spoken derision) on another, nor trenið (derision carved on wood). If it be

known and proved that he has done this, he is liable to outlawry; he shall redeem the offence with an oath of reconciliation; he falls as an outlaw if he is slain. No man shall make exaggeration or slander about another: that is exaggeration if a man says about another what cannot take place, or will not, or has not, saying he is a woman every ninth night, and has borne a child, and calls him gylvin (she-wolf). He is an outlaw, if it is proved; he shall redeem the offense with an oath of reconciliation; he falls as an outlaw if he is slain. (Earlier Gulathing's Law 138)

Indeed, the composition of mocking songs (niðvisur) was even a cause for war in at least one case:

Then he [King Harald Gormsson of Denmark] wanted to sail to Iceland, to take revenge for the derision which all the Icelanders had made on him. The Icelanders had enacted a law that as many niðvisur should be made about the King of Denmark as there were noses in the country.

(Olaf Tryggvason's Saga 36)

Again, these are a customs that fit perfectly well into modern Heiðni practice. Feuds and other grievances can be resolved through the payment of baugr, and those who are deemed to

have committed wrongs irredeemable by such payment are to be shunned by the Heiðinn community.

Vinfengi and Vinátta (Friendship)

Both the terms vinfengi and vinátta can be translated as "friendship". Both describe a semi-formal alliance between two individuals, open or secret, in which both agree to support each other in court cases, feuds, and times of trouble. Persons in such friendship arrangements may call upon one another to do favors.

Such arrangements are often accompanied by the exchange of gifts and the holding of feasts in each others' honor:

...their [the families of Höskuldr Hvítanessgoði and Njáll] vinátta was so great that they invited each other to a feast every autumn and gave each other handsome gifts.
(Njal's Saga 17)

In the Lore, the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but vinátta usually refers to such an arrangement where there is genuine affection between the two parties, while vinfengi is more a friendship of convenience and more for political effect. As such arrangements are informal, they are both entered into and abandoned with no ceremony. As such, they are

completely voluntary, and last as long as both parties find it advantageous and/or desirable to do so.

While both *vinátta* and *vinfengi* are perfectly acceptable institutions for modern *Heiðinjar* to adopt. While it may very well be that the former will be more common than the latter, such formal arrangements of friendship and support are most fitting for the modern Heathen.

Görd (Arbitration)

There exists a tradition of third-party arbitration of disputes in *Heiðinn* society. Often, when tempers are flaring and individuals are not necessarily well-disposed towards rational discourse, having a neutral third party intervene to work out a solution is the best course. Such arbitration could be sought either privately, before a dispute became a legal case, or could be used to settle the outcome of a case in the courts themselves.

Arbitration is also useful in resolving disputes between groups as well as individuals:

After the Thing the chiefs on either side sat at home with many men about them, and much ill blood there was between them. Their friends took this rede, to send word

to Thord the Yeller, who was then the greatest chief in Broadfirth: he was akin to the Kialleking, but closely allied to Thorstein; therefore he seemed to be the likeliest of men to settle peace between them. But when this message came to Thord, he fared thither with many men, and strove to make peace. He found that far apart were the minds of them; yet he brought about truce between them, and a meeting to be summoned. (Eyrbyggja Saga 10)

The motives of the advocate himself vary. Sometimes, the advocate acts out of a sense of right and the earnest desire to resolve a dispute (*drengkapr*), and such men were called *góðviljamenn* or *góðgjarnir menn* (men of goodwill or good deeds):

And as the time approached for the court of confiscation, Thorgils gathered men around him, assembling almost 400 in all. Haflidi had from the north a picked band of 100 men, each chosen for his manliness and equipment. And in a third place the men of the district gathered together for the purpose of intervening with benevolence ("*góðgrinð*"). The leaders of this group were Thord

Gilsson and Hunbogi Thorgilsson from Skarð. With them were also other men of good wishes ("góðgjarnir menn")- Gudmund Brandsson and Ornolf Thorgilsson from Kvennabrekkr, with 200 men for the peacemaking. (The Saga of Thorgils and Haflidi 20)

Other times, however, the advocate receives what is known as *sæmd* ("honorable recompense"):

In the spring thirty of them [men seeking to get Thorkel to act as advocate in a dispute between Hallfred and a cuckolded husband] rode north to Hof and spent the night. Hallfred asked Thorkel what he could expect from him. Thorkel responded that he would take on the case if he were offered some honorable compensation ("*sæmd*"). (Hallfred's Saga 8)

Again, there is little that our ancestors did that does not find a place in our modern *Heiðinn* society. The wisdom in seeking a third party to act as moderator in a dispute is clear; such a person can work out a fair compromise without being clouded by emotion.

-CHAPTER TWO-

EIDAR:

OATHS AND OATH-TAKING

There is perhaps no act with as many vital implications to the practitioner of Heiðni as the taking of oaths (ON *eiðar*). If there is one central tenet of the faith, it is that oaths are sacrosanct in a way that transcends modern understanding.

Should an oath be foresworn at a later date, one can be sure that the wrath of the Gods will be visited upon the oath-breaker either in this world or the next, and the wrath of the community should fall upon him in this one without fail.

More to the point, when an oath is sworn, one is actually and actively influencing the very fabric of the universe. By swearing a formal oath, ones words are being cast into the well of wyrd, and the skein of the universe is altered with the expectation that the words so oathed will take place. It is possible that they will not, either through the conscious decision of the oath-taker or through simple failure of the attempt to bring the oath to fruition. But the universe (specifically through the agency of the Nornir who weave the threads of fate and thereby literally produce the present) resists

such; oaths are the most basic form of magic, an effort to influence the world according to our own desires. Oaths do, however, require our active and often single-minded attention to come to fulfillment.

The most formal sort of oath is sworn at þing, but they could also be taken at a hof (temple) or sumbel, and oaths could of course be sworn at any occasion, and with a variety of wordings. In many instances, the exact wording of the oath is preserved for us:

"A ring, weighing twenty aurar or more, was to lie in every head temple on the altar, and every goði was to wear it on his arm at all law-þings which he should hold himself, and to redden it in the blood of the cattle which he himself sacrificed there. Every man who had to perform legal duties there had first to take an oath on this ring and name two or more witnesses, and say; 'I call to witness that I take oath on the ring, a lawful oath, so help me Frey and Njörd, and the Almighty Ás, to defend or prosecute this case, or give the evidence, verdict, or judgment which I know to be most true and right and lawful,

and to perform everything as prescribed by law
which I have to perform while I am at this þing.'"

(Landnámabok IV, 7)

The wording itself was important in the swearing of an oath, but even new formulations are acceptable as long as the basic elements are included:

"The man who was to take a temple oath held in his hand a silver ring which had been reddened in the blood of the bull which had been sacrificed, and it must weigh not less than three aurar. Then Glum said these words; 'I call Ásgrim and Gizor as witnesses that I take a temple-oath on the ring, and I tell the Æsir that I was not there, and I fought not there, and I did not redden point and edge where Thorvald Krok was slain; now let those who are wise and are present here look to my oath.' The others could not find fault, and said they had not heard this wording before." (Víga-Glum's Saga 25)

Often a number of objects, which are traditionally associated with trust, steadfastness, regularity, and trustworthiness, are invoked in the formula of an oath:

"First thou shalt to me
swear all oaths
at the ship's side,
and at the ship's edge,
at the horse's foot,
and at the sword's edge,
that you did not kill
the wife of Völund
nor put to death
my bride." (Völundarkvida 33)

"Go it thus with you, Atli,
as you to Gunnar
often did swear oaths
and name them of yore.
By the south-slanting sun,
by the rock of Sigty,
by the horse of the bed of rest,
by the ring of Ullr." (Atlakvida 30)

Note in this last example that it is the God Ullr (whom Saxo Grammaticus tells us once took the place of Óðinn as chief of the Gods for a time) who is said to possess a ring upon which

oaths were sworn. Thus his connection with the swearing of oaths, and by extrapolation possibly a role as oath-witness for the rest of the Gods, is seen.

The establishment of a frithstead (that is, a place where peace is declared between all parties, no matter what their grievances with one another), such as is established at the Alþing, is accomplished through a special class of oath, taken by the host of the gathering and binding on the participants:

[Hafr, who was hosting the gathering, said,] "‘Here I establish peace among all men, especially with regard to this man named Gest [actually the outlawed Gretti in disguise], who sits here; and I include all goðorðsmenn and good boendr, and the whole mass of men able to fight, and all other heraðsmenn of the Hegranesþing district, or wherefrom any may have come with or without name, we give by hand-shaking safety and full peace to the unknown stranger who is called Gest, for games, wrestling, and all kind of merriment, for sea or land or by other conveyance; he shall have peace in every named or unnamed place as long as

he needs for a safe return, with observance of the plighted faith. I establish this peace for us, our kinsmen, friends and kindred, men as well as women, thralls and bondwomen, boys and independent men. He who violates the peace or breaks the plighted faith shall be a peace-niðling, and shall be outcast and driven from God and good men in heaven, and from all saints; and shall be received nowhere among men, but be driven away by every man as far as wolves are driven, or wherever Christians go to church, heathens sacrifice in temples, fire burns, earth produces, a speaking child calls its mother, mother bears son, people kindle fires, ships glide, shields glitter, sun shines, snow falls, a Finn runs on skis, fir grows, a hawk flies all the long spring day with a straight fair wind blowing under both wings, heaven encircles, world is settled and wind blows water towards sea, men sow corn; he shall shun churches and Christians, Heiðinn boendr, houses and caves, every home except Hell. Now let us agree and be at peace one

with the other in goodwill, whether we meet on mountain or beach, on ship or snow-shoes, on earth or glacier, on the high sea or on horseback, as if one find his friend on water or his brother on the way; agreeing as well one with another as son with father, or father with son, in all dealings. Now we join our hands together all of us, and keep this truce, and all words spoken in this plight of faith witnessed by God and good men.'" (Grettir's Saga 73)

Although the above version has been Christianized, the formulaic nature of the Oath of Peace is unmistakable. With only minor modifications, it is easily seen how it can be readopted for Heathen use today. Such an oath is particularly sacrosanct, and no matter what the temptation, frith in such circumstances must be upheld at all costs and no matter what the provocation:

"It shall be so [said Hjalti Thordarson], let us keep our oath of peace [see above], though we have been outwitted; let us not ourselves set the example of violating the truce we have declared and given.

Grettir shall go free wherever he likes, and the truce

shall last until he has returned. Then this plighted faith will no longer be in force, whatever may happen between us.' All thanked him, and thought his opinion goði-like, considering the guilt of the person involved." (Grettir's Saga 74)

A vow, even one spoken "only" at sumbel over the mead-horn, while it may not have the formality of an oath sworn at þing on an oath-ring, is nevertheless just as binding, and indeed are often boasts of deeds yet to come which will increase the reputation of the individual making the oath:

"The King [Svein] said, 'I know that it is customary at such celebrations for men to make vows so as to increase their renown. And since you Jómsvíkings are famed in all lands it is likely that your vows will surpass all others. Now I shall make the beginning: I vow that I shall have driven King Æthelræd of England from his kingdom before the beginning of next winter or else have slain him and thus obtained his kingdom. Now it is your turn, Sigvaldi. And make your vow not less.' [Sigvaldi and his brothers make dangerous oaths to perform certain deeds that

will likely get them all killed, but are too drunk to think the wiser of their words.] That was the end of their talks. Then all sought their couches. Sigvaldi went to bed with his wife Ástrid, and he soon fell asleep and slept soundly. When he awoke, Ástrid asked him whether he remembered what vows he had made. He said he remembered nothing. She said, ‘It will not do for you to pretend that you made none.’ And she told him what they were. ‘And we shall need to set all our wits to work.’ Sigvaldi said, ‘What are we to do? You are both wise and resourceful.’ ‘I don’t know,’ she said, ‘but we must contrive something, for you will get few reinforcements from King Svein if you don’t get them now.’” (Jómsvíkingsaga 18)

And so it is seen that even an unwise oath made at table, under the cloud of drink (later in the above-quoted passage, Sigvaldi tries to claim the excuse that ‘one is not responsible for what one said in one’s cups’, but immediately drops the defense knowing it has no merit), must be fulfilled.

Ironically, the most prominent examples we have of

individuals breaking sworn oaths are from the tales describing the actions of the Gods. Rather than being seen as standing above the ken of mortal morality (and thus above the responsibility for upholding such oaths), even the Gods are harmed when they fail an oath, no matter what the ultimate good may come therefrom:

"Óðinn didn't honor
His oath on the ring—
what good is any pledge
he gives?" (Hávamál 110)

Snorri Sturluson relates an interesting and rare account, where the Gods felt that their oath could be foresworn because of the deception of the person to whom they had sworn it. Having agreed to give the builder of Ásgard's walls the sun, the moon, and the Goddess Freyja, should he succeed within a specified time-limit, and sworn mighty oaths guaranteeing the safety of the giant. However, once Þórr returned and learned of the bargain, he ignored the oaths that had been sworn in his absence (at the instigation of the evil Loki, it might be added):

"Þórr alone struck,
swollen with anger—

never idle
when he heard such news;
vows were broken,
promises betrayed.
the solemn treaties
both sides had sworn." (Völuspá 16)

"But when the Æsir saw for certain that it was a mountain giant that they had there, then the oaths were disregarded and they called upon Þórr and he came in a trice and the next thing was that Mjöllnir was raised aloft. Then he paid the builder's wages and it wasn't the sun and moon, instead he stopped him from living in Jötunheim and struck the first blow so that his skull shattered into fragments and sent him down beneath Niflhel." (Gylfaginning 42)

Here we have an interesting conundrum. (As an aside, there is indeed a conundrum within a conundrum here, for Loki is said to have "sworn oaths that he would manage things so the builder would forfeit his payment, whatever it cost him to do it." Swearing an oath to make another break an oath that was made at his own instigation? Wheels within wheels...) The

implication in Snorri is that the mere fact that the builder was a jötun was sufficient to either let the rest of the Gods declare the oaths null and void, or set Þórr into such a rage that he ignored them (and would thus bring himself and the rest of the Æsir under the cloud of breaking their sworn oaths). Earlier in the passage, Snorri does say that the very reason that the oaths were sworn was that "the giants did not think it safe to be among the Æsir without a guarantee of safety if Þórr were to return home..."

It seems as if the Gods were caught in the same sort of trap that had been laid by Grettir for Hafr; they made oaths guaranteeing the safety of their visitor without fully knowing his true nature, and were bound thereby even once that nature was revealed. In the case of the Æsir, they seem to have been willing (or perhaps Þórr forced them into their decision by his rash action) to live with the consequences of breaking those oaths. In the case of Hafr's fellow goðar, they felt it wiser to stick with the oath and seek restitution at a later date. Of course, Hafr didn't have Loki manipulating events against him ...

It is also said that the Goddess Var, of whom precious little else

is known, takes a particular interest in oaths:

[The] ninth [of the Asynjur is] Var: she listens to people's oaths and private agreements that women and men make between each other. Thus these contracts are called varar. She also punishes those who break them. (Gylfaginning 35)

As an aside, it should be noted that those oaths that have come down to us in the Lore are not conditional. That is, they are not made with any "escape clauses", or any conditional "I'll do X if Y happens". An oath simply *is*; by swearing an oath, one is aligning cosmic forces, setting up the universe to expect an action to occur. We work against such oaths, once sworn, at our peril. One does not give the universe an "if-then" statement. One simply gives it a "this will be".

Finally, it must be said that historically (when the apparatus of the law-court was fully in place and had a definite impact on the people) the oath was often used in the context of legal proceedings. While the full intricacies of Heiðni legal procedure are beyond the scope of this chapter, a (very) brief description of such proceedings is thus; ten men might give evidence against an individual, two of whom must swear oaths

to their testimony, and the rest saying that they had heard the accusations but could not prove them. Should ten such individuals be found, the defendant is forced to respond either by oath or ordeal.

If by oath, the defendant swears what is called the *dulareiðr* ("oath of denial"). Depending on the nature of the crime, up to twelve witnesses are called upon to reinforce his oath of innocence. Alternatively, the defendant could undergo ordeal, by which innocence was proven by the successful undertaking of feats of physical endurance or skill, such as passing beneath a piece of cut sod, thrusting the hands into a cauldron of boiling water, or walking on hot irons. The possibility of settling such a dispute through single combat also existed; known as *einvigi* or *holmgang*. The entire issue of Heiðni legal procedures and customs will be dealt with in another chapter.

-CHAPTER FIVE-

LIVING WITH THE EARTH

Our heathen ancestors were farmers.

They were many other things besides; explorers, merchants, warriors, magicians, fathers, mothers, fishermen, kings, and poets, but they were by and large farmers. And it is this connection with the earth which infuses the Heiðni mindset and which framed the view of the world in which the religious beliefs and practices of the ancient Norse found their fullest flower. Without attempting to rekindle the same sort of relationship with, respect for, and instinctive connection to, the earth, the Heiðinn experience will necessarily be incomplete and our modern understanding of the ancient thew between the Gods and men will be wanting.

Of the fact that many if not most of the figures of the Icelandic Sagas lived the farming life there can be little doubt; mentions of farms and farming are so common throughout the sagas that one is hard-pressed to only present a few examples:

"Hauskuld Njal's son and his mother had a farm at Holt, and he was always riding to his farm from

Bergthorsknoll..." (Njal's Saga 103)

"'Sure enough,' says Lyting, 'I had hard work to get away, but still I wish now that thou wouldst get me atoned with Njal and his sons, so that I might keep my farm.'" (Njal's Saga 104)

"(Thorgeir said) '...but tell this to Kari, that he must ride hither to me and be here with me if he will; but though he will not come hither east, still I will look after his farm at Dyrholms if he will, but tell him too that I will stand by him and ride with him to the Althing.'" (Njal's Saga 130)

"Then he (Thorgeir) gave Bjorn a ready-stocked farm at Asolfskal, but he took the farm in the Mark into his own hands. Thorgeir flitted all Bjorn's household stuff and goods to Asolfskal, and all his live stock; and Thorgeir settled all Bjorn's quarrels for him, and he was reconciled to them with a full atonement." (Njal's Saga 151)

"Grettir liked going about and visiting the people in the other farms on the island." (Grettir's Saga 18)

"Towards Yule-tide he made ready to go on a journey to his farm called Slysford on the mainland, whither he had invited a number of his friends." (Grettir's Saga 19)

"At the farm called Muli (the Mull) lived Thord Arndisarson: he was wedded to Thordis, sister of Bork the Stout. They had two sons who were both younger than Asmund the son of Bersi.

"There was also a man with Vali. His farm was named Vali's stead, and it stood on the way to Hrutafiord."

(Kormak's Saga 7)

This connection with the land and the rural lifestyle is not limited to the Norse or Germanic peoples. Even in the lands around the Mediterranean, it was the people who dwelt outside of the large cities (the *pagani*, which means "country-dwellers") were the ones who held out the longest against the encroachment of the new faiths such as Christianity. Their deep connection with the land gave them daily examples of the good things bestowed by the ancient Gods of their fathers, and country-folk have always been of a more conservative and pragmatic bent than their urbanized cousins.

As noted above, while farming was at least part of the lifestyle enjoyed by the ancient heathens, it was not uncommon for them to undertake other endeavors, such as fishing, going on a merchant expedition, joining a war-leader on a (hopefully)

profitable and glory-filled raid, etc. But the return to the farmstead was always at least in the back of the mind, and the counterpoint between the frenetic activity of adventure and the bucolic life of the farm once again demonstrates the dualistic dichotomy of action/inaction that characterizes so much of heathen attitude and experience.

"Thorgeir, the eldest brother, was managing the farm at Reykjarfjord, and often rowed out fishing, as the fjords were full of fish." (Grettir's Saga 11)

And even a king could look forward to the relative quietude of the farm at the end of a long life.

"When King Harald began to grow old he generally dwelt on some of his great farms in Hordaland; namely, Alreksstader or Saeheim, Fitjar, Utstein, or Ogvaldsnes in the island Kormt." (Halfdan the Black's Saga 40)

The question of the productivity of the earth was paramount in ancient times, and for good reason. With a prolonged drought, bad crops, or other circumstance the life of the nation as a whole could be threatened through famine. The connection of kings and the fertility of the land is well attested-to in the Lore, and indeed a good king was often seen as conducive to good

crops, and conversely, poor crops could lead to the necessity of finding a new king...

"Then began in his days the Frode-peace; and then there were good seasons, in all the land, which the Swedes ascribed to Frey, so that he was more worshipped than the other gods, as the people became much richer in his days by reason of the peace and good seasons." (Ynglinga Saga 12)

"Domald took the heritage after his father Visbur, and ruled over the land. As in his time there was great famine and distress, the Swedes made great offerings of sacrifice at Upsal. The first autumn they sacrificed oxen, but the succeeding season was not improved thereby. The following autumn they sacrificed men, but the succeeding year was rather worse. The third autumn, when the offer of sacrifices should begin, a great multitude of Swedes came to Upsal; and now the chiefs held consultations with each other, and all agreed that the times of scarcity were on account of their king Domald, and they resolved to offer him for good seasons, and to assault and kill him, and sprinkle the stalle of the gods with his blood. And

they did so. Thjodolf tells of this:

It has happened oft ere now,
That foeman's weapon has laid low
The crowned head, where battle plain,
Was miry red with the blood-rain.
But Domald dies by bloody arms,
Raised not by foes in war's alarms --
Raised by his Swedish liegemen's hand,
To bring good seasons to the land.

(Yngling Saga 18)

Modern people, including especially Americans, have largely lost this connection to the earth, as a result of both being so removed from the source of the food they eat, as well as being insulated from privation through the general prosperity brought about by the modern global economy. What matters a drought in Kansas when grain can be imported from Argentina with no one (except, of course, the farmers in Kansas) even realizes the change?

This disconnection with the soil, this estrangement from the earth (which is, let us not forget, embodied by Jord, mother of the great God Þórr) one of the most serious factors keeping

Heiðinjar from realizing a true revival of the heathen mindset and attitudes which shaped the ancient faith. And without at least an understanding (a true adoption and internalization would of course be infinitely preferable!) of such attitudes, a true realization of the ancient troth between the Gods and men will be almost impossible to regain. This is one of the differences between Heiðinjar and other modern worshippers of the Norse Gods; where they are 21st century people who happen to be Heathens, we are Heathens who happen to live in the 21st century.

Naturally, it is impossible for most people in the modern world to quit their jobs, sell their homes, and buy a farm somewhere. For no other reason, most urban (and suburban) dwellers simply lack the technical knowledge to run a farm. Too, there are many obligations to family, employers, and friends that cannot lightly be shrugged off. It should be mentioned, however, that mere inconvenience is a sorry excuse for inaction; are we so soft and decadent that the prospect of doing without 24/7 Chinese food delivery service interferes with a decision to become closer with the Earth?

Short of wholeheartedly adopting a rural life (by far the

preferable alternative), there are steps than modern Heiðinjar can take to bring themselves more in tune with the tides and patterns of the earth, and do so in a meaningful way. Key to this is finding a way that, even in a small way, our daily lives are touched by the rhythms of the earth. If possible, those who either dwell in cities or rental apartments should make some effort to remove themselves to a less urbanized locale, but of course this is not always practical. It should, however, be seen as desirable.

For the typical suburbanite, the simplest way to bring this about is to begin a garden, and actually rely on its produce for at least a portion of one's food. It needn't be elaborate (although it certainly could be; there are excellent books available on how to do everything from starting salad garden to maintaining a full fruit-tree orchard in one's back yard), but the feel of the loam on one's hands, and the first-hand knowledge that at least part of one's meal came from the earth, coaxed out by one's own effort and care, is a very effective way of beginning to forge that bond and begin to feel the tug of the rhythms of the earth. Raising small animals (rabbits, chickens, etc.) is the next level of building the attachment to the earth; to

actually see the tides of life with the birth of new babies and the death of older animals brings the tides of life home as little else save a full life itself, can.

Even those who lack a large plot of land on which to establish a garden (or raise animals) can take steps to bring themselves more in tune with the tides of the earth. Indoor container or rooftop gardening, while several steps removed from the subsistence-level farming in which Heiðni was originally forged, does provide a small link to the agricultural roots of our ancestors, and can be seen as at least a beginning. Hunting and fishing, done on a regular basis and once again for subsistence, is also a good way to come back in tune with the rhythms of nature.

It should be noted that the call to the simpler life, with a deeper connection to the earth, is not a call for the complete renunciation of modern life, modern technology, and so forth.

We are not Luddites. Modern Heiðinjar do not aspire to be "heathen Amish" (although there are indeed many worse things that might be aspired to!), but rather to bring back an appreciation for and connection to the tides and rhythms of the earth. Modern life works to remove us from those tides and

rhythms, by the ever-increasing-specialization we are forced to undertake in our lives by our modern post-industrial society. As heathens, we should ever seek to re-establish those ties, to bring us ever-closer to the ancient understanding of our Gods and ourselves.

LAND-TAKING

Especially during the early years of the settlement of Iceland, it was the custom of folks to claim land by defining its boundaries with fire. This could either be done by walking with a torch or other flame around the perimeter of the land, or by shooting a flaming arrow over it:

"Jörund goði, son of Hrafn Heimski, settled west of Fljót, where it is now called Svertingsstadir; there he raised a large temple. A small piece of land lay unsettled east of Fljót, between Krossá (river) and Jöldustein; Jörund went with fire around this, and made it the property of the temple." (Landnamabók v, 3)

"Onund the Wise took up land in the valley of Merkigil. When Eirik (from Goddalir) wanted to settle in the valley west of it, Onund threw blótspán [i.e., cast rune-lots for divination] to ascertain when Eirik would come and take

up the land. Onnund then forestalled him, and shot with a burning arrow across the river, and thus took possession of the land west of it and dwelt on it." (Landnamabók iii, 8)

In modern practice, walking around the boundaries of newly-purchased land with a candle or torch is the most common practice (since local firefighting authorities usually take a dim view of flaming arrows being lobbed around local neighborhoods).

Witnesses should be present to observe the rite:

"Odd rode to a house which was not quite burnt down [the goði Blundketil had been burned to death in his house by his enemies]. He stretched out his hand and pulled a rafter of birch-wood out of the house, and then rode against the sun [i.e., widdershins, or counterclockwise] 'round the houses with the burning brand and said: 'Here I settle on this land, for I do not see any homestead; may the witnesses present hear it.' He then whipped his horse and rode away." (Hænsa Þori's Saga 9)

It was also possible to dedicate a particular piece of land to

one's favorite God or Goddess, which would be reflected in the name given to the property:

"Asbjörn Reykrketilsson and his brother Steinfinn took up land above Krossá, and east of Fljot. . . . Asbjörn consecrated his land to Þórr, and called it Þórrsmörk."

(Landnamabók v, 2)

THE LANDVÆTTIR

The Landvættir are guardian spirits of the land; in this way they are analagous to the Dísir and Hamingja, who serve the same function on the level of the family or individual. The well-being of the land is directly tied to the presence and goodwill of the Landvættir, and care must be taken not to offend or frighten them:

"It was the beginning of the heathen laws that men should not go with a head-ship [i.e., a ship with a dragon-head on the prow] out on the main sea, or, if they did, they should take the heads off before they saw land, and not approach it with gaping heads and yawning snout, that the Landvættir not be frightened." (Landnamabók iv, 12)

And it was also possible to harm an enemy by acting against the Landvættir that were associated with their lands (this is the

niðing-pole):

"And when they were ready to sail Egil went upon an island. He took into his hand a hazel-pole and went on a projecting rock, pointing landwards. He took a horse's head and fastened it upon the pole; then he said the following words: 'Here I raise a pole as a curse, and I turn this curse upon King Eirik and Queen Gunnhild.' He turned the horse's head so that it pointed landwards. 'I turn this curse on the guardian spirits who dwell in this country, so that they shall all go astray, and no one of them shall meet or find his home until they have driven King Eirik and Gunnhild from the land.' He then thrust the pole into a rift in the rock, and let it stand there; he carved runes on the pole which told all this imprecation. Thereupon he went on board ship and sailed." (Egil's Saga 60)

While the Landvættir were most often associated with the land itself, it is possible a given person to become favored by them and enjoy their good graces:

"Björn (an Icelandic) dreamt one night that a rock-dweller [Landvættir] came to him and offered to enter

into partnership with him, and he consented. Thereafter a he-goat came to his goats, and they increased so much that he soon became very rich. After this he was called He-goat Björn. Second-sighted men saw that all Landvættir followed He-goat Björn to the Þing, and Thorstein and Thórd (his brothers) to hunting and fishing." (Landnamabók iv, 12)

-CHAPTER SIX-
GØRNINGAR:
MAGIC AND SORCERY

In the Heiðni tradition, as it was during the Víking Age, the practice of magic is not a requirement. Indeed, by far the majority of Heiðinjar do not indulge in any overt magical practices. Even though such practices are relatively rare, they are by no means seen as "evil" or corrupt (with the possible exception of seiðr when practiced by men, but more on that below). It is merely another skill in the arsenal that may or may not be developed, depending on the inclination and aptitude of the individual. Such magical lore is called *kunnátta*, and various the magics in general are called *gørningar*.

GALDR

Galdr is the magical practice most often associated with the Norse, for it involves the runes. However, it must be pointed out (due to the enormous popularity of the misconception) that *there is no reason to believe that the runes were ever used as a divinatory device!* Rune-galdr is quite well attested to in the Lore, but it is invariably an *active* magical practice; what

modern folks would call "casting spells". Indeed, knowing the future is specifically attributed to spá, rather than rune-galdr. There are several different runic alphabets, known as fuparks ("futharks", from the sounds of the first few symbols, just like the modern word "alphabet" comes from the Greek letters α and β). In modern-day paganism, the Elder Futhark is best known, with twenty-four staves or individual runes. ***(Not twenty-five; if you see a reference to a twenty-fifth "blank rune" or one named "wyrd", that should throw up a red flag that what you're reading is nonsense!)*** The Elder Futhark went out of use around the beginning of the Víking Age, and for this reason the Younger Futhark of sixteen staves is usually used by Heiðinjar. In addition, there is an Anglo-Saxon futhark of 32 staves and an Armanen futhark of 18 staves (which itself is a modern invention of the early 20th century and as such of severely limited use within a paleo-heathen religious system, whatever intrinsic merits it may hold).

The meanings (exoteric and esoteric) of the various rune-staves within the various futharks have been preserved for us in several "rune poems". The fact that we have several of these poems from different times and places allows us to enjoy a

cross-section of various points of view on the runes from the Viking Age or immediately thereafter. We also have several explicit examples from the Lore of how the Runes could be used, and for what purposes they were.

SEIÐR

Seiðr is often compared to Amerindian or Siberian shamanism, and there are many similarities between the two practices.

While it has become something of a "catch-all" magical system in modern heathenry, the Lore is in fact quite specific about what, precisely, falls under the heading of seiðr.

SPÁ

Spá, sometimes referred to as spá-craft, is specifically concerned with divination of the future through communicating with spirits. The most well-known example comes from Erik the Red's Saga:

"There was a woman there in the Settlement whose name was Thorbjorg; she was a seeress [ON *spákona*] and was called the Little Sibyl. She had had nine sisters [H. adds all of them were seeresses], but now only she was left alive. It was Thorbjorg's practice of a winter to attend feasts, and those men in particular invited her to their

homes who were curious to know their future or the season's prospects. Because Thorkel was the leading householder there it was considered his responsibility to find out when these hard times which now troubled them would come to an end, so he invited her to his home, and a good reception was prepared for her, as was the custom when a woman of this kind should be received. A high-seat was prepared for her, and a cushion laid down, in which there must be hen's feathers.

"When she arrived in the evening, along with the man who had been sent to escort her, this is how she was attired: she was wearing a blue cloak with straps which was set with stones right down to the hem; she had glass beads about her neck, and on her head a black lambskin hood lined inside with white catskin. She had a staff in her hand, with a knob on it; it was ornamented with brass and set around with stones just below the knob. Round her middle she wore a belt made of touchwood, and on this was a big skin pouch in which she kept those charms she needed for her magic. On her feet she had hairy calf-skin shoes with lengthy, strong-looking thongs to them,

and on the thong-ends big knobs of lateen. She had on her hands catskin gloves which were white inside and furry.

"Now when she came inside everyone felt bound to offer her fit and proper greetings, which she received according as their donors found favour with her. Master Thorkel took the prophetess by the hand and led her to the seat which had been made ready for her. Thorkel then asked her to run her eyes over household and herd and likewise the home. She had little comment to make about anything. During the evening tables were brought in, and what food was prepared for the seeress must now be told of. There was porridge made for her of goat's beestings, and for her meat the hearts of all living creatures that were available there. She had a brass spoon and a walrus-ivory-handled knife mounted with a double ring of copper, with its point broken off. Then when the tables were cleared away farmer Thorkel walked up to Thorbjorg and asked what she thought of the household there and men's state and condition, and how soon he [H. she] would be informed as to the things he had asked her and which men wanted to know. She replied that she

would have nothing to announce till the following morning, when she had slept there the night through.

"But on the morrow, in the latter part of the day, she was fitted out with the apparatus she needed to perform her spells. She asked too to procure her such women as knew the lore which was necessary for performing the spell, and bore the name Varblokur [H. Varblokkur], Spirit-locks. But no such women were to be found, so there was a search made right through the house to find whether anyone was versed in these matters.

"'I am unversed in magic,' was Gudrid's reply, 'neither am I a prophetess, yet Halldis my foster-mother taught me in Iceland the lore [H. chant] which she called Varblokur.'

'Then you are wiser than I dared hope,' said Thorbjorg.

'But this is a kind of lore and proceeding I feel I cannot assist in,' said Gudrid, 'for I am a Christian woman.' 'Yet it might happen,' said Thorbjorg, 'that you could prove helpful to people in this affair, and still be no worse a woman than before. Still, I leave it to Thorkel to procure me the things I need here.'

"Thorkel now pressed Gudrid hard, till she said she would

do as he wished. The women now formed a circle all round, while Thorbjorg took her seat up on the spell-platform [ON *seiðhjallinum*]. Gudrid recited the chant so beautifully and well that no one present could say he had ever heard the chant recited by a lovelier voice. The seeress thanked her for the chant, saying that she had attracted many spirits there who thought it lovely to lend ear to the chant-- spirits 'who before wished to hold aloof from us, and pay us no heed. And now many things stand revealed to me which earlier were hidden from me as from others. And I can tell you that this famine will not last longer [H. adds than this winter], and that the season will mend when spring comes. The sickness which has long afflicted us, that too will mend sooner than was expected. As for you, Gudrid, I shall repay you here and now for the help we have derived from you, for your future is now an open book to me. You will make a match here in Greenland, the most distinguished there is, yet it will not prove of long duration; for your ways lie out to Iceland, where there will spring from you a great and goodly progeny, and over this progeny of yours shall a

bright ray shine. And so, my daughter, farewell now, and happiness go with you.'

"After this men approached the prophetess and inquired one by one about what they were most concerned to know. She was free with her information, and small part indeed of what she said failed to come true. Next she was sent for from another house, and off she went, and then Thorbjorn was sent for, because he was not prepared to stay in the house while such heathenry was practiced."

(Erik the Red's Saga 4)

OTHER MAGICAL ARTS

Other magical practices are attested to in the Lore. Divination by interpreting the flights of birds (euphemistically called "knowing the language of birds") was used to cross-check other forms of divination. The interpretation of dreams was also well known, as were the use of magical amulets.

-CHAPTER SEVEN-

BLÓT:

SACRIFICE TO THE GODS

The Sagas and poetic sources give several clear examples of the mechanics underlying the worship of the Gods during the Viking Era. While a *blót* (pronounced "bloat" and meaning "sacrifice") might be held for any occasion, there were four fixed times of the year at which they were regularly scheduled; in autumn (*disablót*), at the beginning of winter (*vetrnættir*), midwinter (*jól*), and the beginning of spring (*sigrblót*). An *alfablót*, held either in the fall or spring (depending on the location), was also celebrated, although it was more of a personal household celebration than a public one.

All of the blótar, being as much public festivals as they are religious ceremonies, are held with great feasts, known as *blótveitsla*:

"There are twelve men who are the foremost in managing the blótveitsla (sacrifice-feasts); this spring Ölvir is to hold the feast; he is now very busy in Mæri, and all provisions needed for the feast are brought thither." (St.

Olaf's saga, 115)

This is a feature that applies not only to the three fixed-time blótar, but to those which are held for specific purposes, as well. All of the blótar consist of both the sacrifice of animals (sometimes, but not always, the type of animal depends on the God to whom the offering was being made), followed by a feast and drinking in ritual toasts known as *sumbel* (a singular noun that refers to all of the toasts together). The sagas relate:

"Sigurd Hlada-jarl was a very great sacrificer, as his father Hakon had been; he kept up all the blótveitsla (sacrificing-feasts) in Thrandheim on the king's behalf. It was an old custom when a sacrifice was to take place that all the *boender* (farmers) should come to the Hóf, and take with them the provisions needed while the feast lasted. Every man was to bring ale; there were also slaughtered all kinds of small cattle, as well as horses. All the blood which came therefrom was called *hlaut*, the vessels for holding it *hlaut-bolli*, and the twigs, *hlaut-tein*. With them the altars had to be reddened all over, and also the walls of the temple inside and outside; then the men were to be sprinkled with them, but the flesh had to

be boiled for the people to eat." (Hakon Adalsteinfostri
16)

The consecration of items (such as the food and drinking-horns mentioned above) was accomplished by carrying them around the fire (compare this with the use of fire to claim land by carrying the fire around the boundaries of the property). In modern practice, this may be done by carrying the object to be sanctified around a fire three times, each time reciting the following:

"Æsir ok Alfar, helgi _____ thetta."

("Gods and Elves, make this _____ holy.")

Where the _____ is filled in with whatever it is that is to be sanctified; hlaut (sacrificial blood), meaðu (mead), bjór (beer), etc. This is a modern invention; no description of the actual words used (if any) survives.

It is also possible to sanctify food and drink by making the sign of Þórr's Hammer over it. This is a motion made with the hand resembling an inverted **T**; it was similar enough to the Christian tradition of making the sign of a cross over one's cup that the one could be confused for the other.

We are also told in two separate sources (Adam of Bremen's

"History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen" and "Erik the Red's Saga") that songs (what modern readers would refer to as ballads or poems) were also recited as part of Heiðni ritual. The first example deals specifically with the *blót*, and the second (which gives much more detail) deals specifically with *seið*, but the general principle-- that a poem of some mythological and/or religious significance is recited prior or during a religious rite-- may reasonably be assumed to apply to both sorts of rituals.

The basic outline of a blót is thus:

Sanctification of the area (*helgi*)

Sacrifice of animals

Reddening of the altars, temple walls, and participants with the blood of the sacrifices

A feast (*veitsla*) made of the meat from the sacrifices, with the food being consecrated

Recitation of skaldic or Eddaic poetry (*kvæði*) appropriate to the *blót*

Formal drinking at the feast (*sumbel*), with the horns of drink being consecrated

In our modern industrial society, it is rare indeed to have the

opportunity or knowledge necessary to kill the sacrificial animals in a way that is efficient and painless. Most urban and suburban dwellers will also simply not have the space or access to livestock necessary. Of course, it is preferable, if possible, to go through the actual sacrifice of the animals itself, but there are alternatives that at least involve most of the process. It is possible to purchase frozen beef or pork blood in some specialty food stores (such as oriental supermarkets). If such is properly sanctified and treated with due reverence (the same goes for store-bought meat for the feast), modern practitioners may pick up the blót at step #2.

Helga

The notion of creating some sort of "sacred" space; a place on Earth which is particularly conducive and/or pleasing to the energies and attentions of the Divine, is an almost universal concept. Naturally, the ancient Norse had their own traditions for creating and maintaining such areas (called *vé*), and there are many references in the Lore that pertain to this practice. The forebears of the Norse, the Germanii, who centuries before the start of the Viking Age dwelt in what we now call Germany, were observed to create such sacred places, but to

maintain them outdoors as a matter of course:

"For the rest, from the grandeur and majesty of beings celestial, they judge it altogether unsuitable to hold the Gods enclosed within walls, or to represent them under any human likeness. They consecrate whole woods and groves, and by the names of the Gods they call these recesses; divinities these, which only in contemplation and mental reverence they behold." (Tacitus, *Germania*).

While this does not directly comment on the doings of the Heathen Norse, it does give an indication of the general state of the culture that pre-dates them. Fortunately, we have access to a contemporary account during the Viking period that does corroborate the fact that sacred spaces outdoors were definitely among the practices of the Norse. Speaking of a wooded island in Russia used by the Rus (a Norse group that extensively explored and essentially founded modern Russia), Ibn Fadlan relates:

"When the ships come to this mooring place, everybody goes ashore with bread, meat, onions, milk and intoxicating drink and betakes himself to a long upright piece of wood that has a face like a man's and is

surrounded by little figures, *behind which are long stakes in the ground.*" (Ibn Fadlan, Risala, 85-- emphasis added)

We see here a little more detail, in the long wooden stakes behind the wooden idols on the island. Clearly we are seeing the same sort of "sacred grove" mentioned in Tacitus, but where the more ancient Germanii consecrated entire forests, the more modern Rus have merely set aside a portion of the wooded isle for their worship. Indeed, it has been speculated that such is the meaning of the long stakes; they form the perimeter of the vé, possibly cordoned off with rope, although it does remain speculation.

The use of such stakes in connection with outdoor sacred spaces was recently confirmed by direct archaeological evidence. Icelandic archaeologist Bjarni F. Einarsson, working on a dig near a mound at the entrance to the Laxárdalur valley near Höfn í Hornafirdi, southeast Iceland, said in the Morgunbladid newspaper on September 10th, 1999:

"Up to now no sacrificial site from the Viking Age has been investigated in the Nordic cultural area. The sacrificial site is around four metres from the mound and

people ate there, cooked food, made fires and possibly returned again and again to the place, *sticking pegs into the earth* (emphasis added), probably to make sacrifices to the dead person who lay in the mound, their ancestor, one imagines, because he remained part of the family, although he had gone." (HYPERLINK "http://www.icenews.is/10sep99.html" \l "sit"<http://www.icenews.is/10sep99.html#sit>)

The inference is clear. For some reason, as the descendents of the dead man returned to honor him in his mound, they were driving stakes into the ground in order to do so. While we must acknowledge that we are still speculating, it does not seem unreasonable to assume that such stakes were used to demarcate the vé for the ritual at hand. In the case of the Rus on their island, such stakes seem to have been permanently set up, while the archaeological example implies that the stakes were re-set for each ritual. It should also be pointed out that temples (a Norse temple was called a *hof*) were often described as being surrounded by a high plank fence, or *skiðgarðar*. The use of fire to consecrate objects has been mentioned elsewhere, as has its use in setting land boundaries. It is hardly

a huge leap to assay that it could have been used in a combination of the two functions. Thus we have the basis for the modern Heiðni practice of the creation of the vé. It is a modern creation in its details, but is consistent with what is told to us in the Lore in its broad outline.

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The area to be marked as the vé should first be marked out with wooden stakes. These may be further linked together with rope, but that is not necessary. The goði (or whoever is creating the vé) should then carry fire around the perimeter of the vé.

Walking "against the sun" (i.e., counter-clockwise) is hinted at as being beneficial, but there is no firm evidence one way or the other. While he or she walks around the vé carrying the fire, the following prayer may be repeated (note that this is a modern invention; we have no evidence for what words, if any, were actually spoken during the Víking Age):

"Æsir ok alfar, helgi vé thetta"

("Aesir and elves, make this vé holy")

Once the entire boundary of the vé has been marked by the fire, the vé is complete and may then be used for whatever purpose (permanent or temporary) intended. For those working

indoors and who don't want to sacrifice their security deposit by pounding stakes into apartment floors, it should be a simple enough affair to rig up free-standing stakes with wide bases (an indoor vé that occupies an entire room wouldn't need such things, of course; the walls of the room itself would serve to define the boundaries of the vé). A temporary vé may be taken down by simply removing the stakes and thanking the spirits of the land or house (*landvættir* or *hausvættir*).

As an aside, something should be said at this juncture concerning the modern Ásatrú ritual known as the "hammer hallowing". While this can be in and of itself a very effective and stirring rite, it is completely unattested to in the Lore. It seems to have found it's way into Ásatrú from other neo-pagan religions such as Wicca (which has a similar ceremony known as the Calling of the Corners) or from 19th century Ceremonial Magick. Too, there is no evidence at all for the use of life-sized hammers in any sort of historical ritual, either from the literary or archaeological evidence available to us; that seems to be a completely modern invention.

While a complete discussion of altars and idols is beyond the scope of this chapter, it should be said that a simple altar of

heaped stones (known as a *hörg*) was the norm in an outdoor situation, and of wood or mixed materials indoors. Idols of wood were found both outdoors and within the walls of the temples (although it seems as if those found indoors were much larger than those outdoors; note that the Rus sailors in Ibn Fadlan's account carried their idols with them, while those in most accounts of Norse temples were life-size or larger). Once the vé has been created, there are certain taboos which must be observed to enable it to retain its sacred status. First and foremost among these is the concept of the vé as a peace-*stead* (*friðgarð*). That is, the shedding of blood or even the carrying of weapons into the vé compromises its sacred nature, as does polluting the ground with bodily wastes:

"Now Thorolf called that ness Thorsness which lieth between Swordfirth and Templewick; on the ness is a fell, and that fell Thorolf held in such worship that he laid down that no man unwashed should turn his eyes thither, and that nought should be done to death on the fell, either man or beast, until it went therefrom of its own will. That fell he called Holy Fell, and he trowed that thither he should fare when he died, and all his kindred from the

ness.

"On the tongue of the ness whereas Thor had come a-land he made all dooms be held, and thereon he set up a county Thing. And so holy a place that was, that he would nowise that men should defile the field with blood-shedding, and moreover none should go thither for their needs, but to that end was appointed a skerry called Dirtskerry." (HYPERLINK "../lore/sagas/eyrbyggja/english.html" \l "4"[Eyrbyggja Saga 4](#))

(It's interesting to note that, as fire is seen as cleansing and sanctifying objects and land, so too is water seen as cleansing humans.) We also see the exact same proscription in the tale of Thorhadd the Old (told in Landnámabók), who had been hofgoði at Mæri in Thronðheim. When he went over to Iceland, he took down the temple beforehand and carried with him the hof-mold (mold or earth under the foundations of the temple) together with the sacred columns. He settled on Stöðvarfjörð, on the eastern coast of Iceland, to which he transferred the sacredness of Mæri (Mærina helgi) to the whole Fjörð. He allowed no living being to be killed there, except the cattle that he required to be slaughtered for his household.

And we later see that, once the proscription against bloodshed was broken, the sacred nature of the vé was no more:

"Now Thord thus set forth the beginning of the award:

"Let hap abide as hap befell"; said that for no manslayings nor hurts which had happed at Thorsness should man-gild be paid. The field he gave out unhallowed because of the blood shed in wrath that had fallen thereon, and that land he declared now no holier than another, laying down that the cause thereof were those who first bestirred them to wounding others. And that he called the only peace-breaking that had betid, and said withal that no Thing should be held there thenceforward." (HYPERLINK "../lore/sagas/eyrbyggja/english.html" \l "10"[Eyrbyggja Saga 10](#))

Fornama Saga also tells us that when King Olaf Tryggvason went into the temple at Mæri, his retainers who followed him were unarmed; the king himself had only a gold-mounted staff or mace in his hand. The Vatnsdala Saga tells us that Hrafn had to give up a splendid sword, because he had, while absorbed in conversation with the goði Ingemund, heedlessly entered with his sword in hand into the temple in Vatnsdal, which the latter

presided over:

"It is not the custom," said Ingemund to him, "to bear arms into the temple, and thou wilt be exposed to the wrath of the Gods if thou do not make atonement."

(Vatnsdala Saga 16)

It would be safest, he added, for Hrafn to give him the sword, and thus enable him to appease the wrath of the Gods.

It should also be pointed out that additional restrictions on the maintenance of sacred space could be applied as a result of a personal oath, or a deal between the goði and the Gods. For example, Hrafnkel's Saga tells of a horse, held sacred to Freyr, that no man save Hrafnkel should ride on pain of death. The proscription against unwashed men looking upon Helganes (mentioned above), could also fall into this category. There is theoretically no limit on what form these sorts of additional restrictions could take; anything from the banning of the consumption of alcohol to forcing all within to be bound with chains (as is mentioned in Tacitus) to symbolize their devotion. As with all modern Heiðni practices, when creating sacred space we turn to the ancient forms as practiced by the Norse during the Viking age. While we cannot know for certain the

exact details of the ancient rites-- the words used, the gestures made-- enough survives to us to be able to recreate the general form. With such a framework there is no need to invent rituals such as the hammer-hallowing; the Lore provides its own solution to that perceived lack.

Veitsla

The lore is replete with descriptions of various feasts and banquets. While many of them are in the context of religious observances (a feast almost invariably accompanied a blót; see [HYPERLINK "blot.html"Blót and Sumbel](#)), they were often held for secular occasions as well; weddings, political events, to celebrate the coming of an important visitor, or merely as a display of hospitality. A reputation for hospitality was one of the highest-regarded traits in the Víking era:

"Geirrid settled in Borgardal, inside Alpta fjord. She caused her house to be built across the high-road, so that all were obliged to ride through it. A table set with food, which was given to everyone who wanted it, always stood ready. Owing to this, she was looked upon as a high-minded woman." (Erybyggja Saga 8)[HYPERLINK \l](#)

"1"[1](#)

"Illugi the Red, from Hólm, came to the ship, and invited him [Hörd] and all his men to stay with him, and did everything most honorable to them. Hörd took this well, and thought it a good invitation; he went to him with twenty-five men, and they were treated with ale all the winter, with the greatest liberality." (Hörd's Saga

19)HYPERLINK \l "1"1

The setting for such feasts was usually as fancy and well-appointed as possible, often in buildings designed for that very purpose:

"Áki owned a large and old feast-hall; he had a new hall made; it was as large as the other, and very well made; he had it covered all over with new hangings, and the old hall with old ones. When the kings came to the feast, Eirik with his hird was seated in the old hall, and Harald with his men in the new hall. All the table service was arranged so that Eirik and his men had old vessels and horns, though they were gilded and well ornamented. Harald and his men had only new vessels and horns; they were all ornamented with gold, painted with images, and bright like glass. The drink on both sides was very good."

(Harald Fairhair's Saga 15)

We also have descriptions of the layout of the feast-hall itself and the preparations that were made for the feast:

"Ásta rose at once, and bade men and women prepare for him [King Olaf] in the best manner. She set four women to take the fittings of the *stofa*, and quickly arrange the hangings and the benches. Two men spread straw on the floor, two brought in the *trapiza* [the table at the entrance to the hall], and the *skapker* [the vat that held the ale from which the cups were filled]; two placed the tables, two the food, two she sent away from the house, and two carried in the ale; all the others, both men and women, went out into the yard. Messengers went to King Sigurd, to take him his *tigmarklædi* (royal garments) and his horse, which had on a gilt saddle and the bit was gilt all over and enamelled. Four men Ásta sent in four different directions throughout the district, inviting the high-born men to a feast, in order to welcome her son. All who were there were dressed in their best clothes, and to those who had none suitable she lent clothes." (St. Olaf's Saga 30)

"The king [Harald Fairhair] had nearly three hundred men

when he came to the feast, but Thórólf had five hundred men already there. Thórólf had prepared a large corn-barn, and set benches in it; there they drank, for no other room was large enough for them all to be in it together. Shields were hung all 'round the room. The king sat down in a high-seat. When the room was full from one end to the other, he looked 'round and got red in the face, but said nothing, and they felt that he was angry. The feast was splendid, and all the provisions were of the very best." (Egil's Saga, 11)

Feasts were also ways of displaying rank and importance. Not only could a reputation for generosity and wealth be gained through the hosting of a feast, but the seating at the feast itself is of primary importance, as the relative ranking of the guests is determined by their place at the table:

"The Icelandic chiefs Olaf Höskuldsson and Usvifr continued their friendship, though there was some rivalry between the younger men. That summer Olaf held a feast half a month before winter; Usvifr had also prepared one on the first winternights. Each invited the other, with as many men as he thought proper. Usvifr went first to the

feast of Olaf, and at the appointed time came to Hjarðarholt; his daughter Gudrun with her husband Bolli and his sons were with him. The next morning, as they walked along the hall, a woman stated how the women should be seated; at this time Gudrun stood opposite to the bed where Kjartan Olafsson slept. Kjartan was dressing, and put on a scarlet kirtle; he said to the woman who had spoken about the seats, for no one was quicker to answer than he, 'Hrefna shall sit in the high-seat, and be most honored in every respect while I am alive.' Gudrun had always before sat in the high-seat at Hjarðarholt and elsewhere. She heard this, and looked at Kjartan and turned pale, but said nothing." (Laxdæla Saga 46)

It was not unknown for lots to be drawn to determine the seating among the guests at the feast, sometimes with match-making as a result (the pairing of feasting partners of the opposite sex seems to have been a common custom):

"Twelve guests were to sit together, and lots were drawn about who should sit next to Astrid, the daughter of Vigfus hersir; Eyjolf, an Icclander who was on a visit,

always draw the lot to sit at her side; no one noticed that they talked more to each other than other people; but many said it would end in her becoming his wife."

(Vigaglun's Saga 4)

"Egil and his brother Thórólf were on a Víking expedition, and went to Halland. As they did not ravage there, Arnfid Jarl invited them to a feast, and they went, with thirty men from their ships. Before the tables were put up, the Jarl said that the seats would be allotted there; that men and women should drink together, as many as could, but those who were without companions should drink by themselves. They placed the lots in a cloth, and the Jarl picked them out. He had a very handsome daughter, then well full-grown. The lots fell out so that Egil should sit at her side that evening." (Egil's Saga 48)

In addition to the (usually rather plain) food that was served, the great drinking at a feast was a usual occurrence:

"His [Thórólf Skjálgr's] foster-son Rögnvald said to the cup-bearers, that if men got very drunk in the beginning the feast would be considered a great feast, and told them to carry as much drink in as they could." (Olaf

Tryggvason's Saga 145)

Indeed, there were laws and customs that governed drinking at the feast, but this varied from place to place. Here, the custom of men on Víking expeditions to drink together is contrasted with the practice of drinking in mixed pairs (as mentioned above):

"In the evening, when the toasts were to be drunk, it was the custom for kings who ruled in the land and for their guests to drink in pairs at feasts in the evening, each man and woman together, as far as possible, the old ones keeping by themselves. It was the law of Vikings, even if they were at feasts, to drink in parties [together]. King Hjörvard's high-seat was prepared opposite King Granmar's, and all his men sat on that bench. King Granmar told his daughter Hildigunn to make herself ready and carry ale to the Vikings. She was the most beautiful of women. She took a silver cup, filled it, and went before King Hjörvard and said, 'Hail, all Ylfingar, to Hrolf Kraki's memory;' she drank half of it and handed it to Hjörvard. He took the cup and her hand with it, and said she must come and sit at his side. She answered that

it was not Viking custom to drink in pairs with women. Hjörvard said that he would rather make a change in the Viking laws in order to drink in pairs with her."

(Ynglinga Saga 41)[HYPERLINK \l "1"1](#)

The guests were served by *skenkjarar* (cup-fillers), who would fill the ale-horns from a large vat known as a *skapker*. On special occasions, high-ranking women would also bring around the horns for the guests. In addition to the food and drink (as well as the recitation of Skaldic and Eddaic poetry and Sagas), musicians were sometimes brought to the feast:

"When King Olaf of Sweden came to the table he asked where lawman Emund was. On hearing that he was at home at his lodgings, he said, 'Go after him; he shall be my guest today.' Thereupon the dishes were brought in, and afterwards players with harps and *gigjar* [fiddles]

entered." (St. Olaf's Saga 96)[HYPERLINK \l "1"1](#)

It is also the custom for the host to send his guests off with parting gifts, as a further example of his generosity:

"The feast was magnificent, and the people were sent away with gifts." (Vigaglum's Saga 4)

"Then the Vikings went to their ships, and they separated

from the Jarl in friendship and exchanged gifts." (Egil's

Saga 48)[HYPERLINK \l "1"1](#)

"After the feast Thorgeir gave large gifts. He gave his kinsman Finnbogi five stud horses, dandelion yellow in color. It was said that they were the best horses in Nordlendingafjording." (Finnboga Saga 23)

"On the day the king was about to leave, Thórólf went to him and asked him to go down with him to the beach. The king went. There the dragon which Thórólf had made was floating, with tents and all outfittings. Thórólf gave it to the king, and asked him to consider that so many guests had been invited to do him honor, and not to compete with him. The king took this well." (Egil's Saga 11)

It should also be noted that such feasts were not normally single-evening affairs. They were combined with giving hospitality to the guests, who would typically spend as many as three days with the host:

"The king was not very merry, and stayed there [at Thórólf's feast] for three nights, as he intended." (Egil's Saga 11)

"Einar waited three nights for him [Egil]; as it was not customary to make a visit longer than three nights, he prepared to go away." (Egil's Saga 82)

Kvæði

Adam of Bremen is known to have written of the great Hof at Uppsala in his History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen. While his depiction of the temple structure itself is impressive and worthy of a great deal of study, it is often overlooked for a key insight into a feature of Heiðni rituals that it conveys:

"To the pagans the grove (which lay near the temple) is so sacred that each individual tree is thought divine by virtue of the death or corruption of the creature sacrificed. ... A certain Christian informed me he had seen seventy-two miscellaneous bodies suspended there. For the rest, the trivial songs that they use in this sort of sacrificial rite are many and shocking, so it is best to keep quiet about them." (Adam of Bremen, Book IV, Ch. 26 & 27)

Aside from his personal interpretation about the motives of the heathens (that it was the "corruption" of the bodies that lent sacredness to the trees of the grove), Adam's second-hand

account makes it clear that the singing of songs was an integral part of the ceremony.

However, it should be remembered that the ON terms (such as *kvæði*, *kviða*, *songr* and *lioð*) we normally translate as "song" is not necessarily the same as our modern lyrical song set to music. On the contrary, it was the custom to recite a ballad or poem, of the sort to be found in skaldic or eddaic verse, and we would refer to that as "song".

We will probably never know the exact contents of these songs. This is an effect which was not unintentional, as the ultimate goal of Christianity was the complete extermination of *Heiðni* beliefs and practices, not their dispassionate study and careful preservation. It is unsurprising that the songs used during *Heiðni* worship were deemed to be "shocking" to contemporary Christian sensibilities; as they were doubtless paeans to the Norse Gods.

There is another famous verse from the sagas wherein song plays a role in a religious context, and that is the story of the coming of the *spákona* (very loosely translated as witch or shamaness) in Greenland (part of the collection today known as the Vinland sagas). It relates that the recitation of songs (or

in this case a specific song—*Varðlokur*—for a specific ritual—*seið*) was an absolute necessity if the ritual was to be undertaken:

"Towards the end of the following day such preparations were made for her (the *spákona*) as she needed for the performing of the *seið*. She bade them get women who knew the witchcraft songs which were used for the *seið*, called *Varðlokur*; but such women could not be found; search was made on the farm if any one knew them. Then Gudrid (the daughter of an Icelfander by name Thorbjörn, who had emigrated to Greenland) said, 'I am neither skilled in witchcraft nor a sorceress, but nevertheless Halldis, my foster-mother, taught me a poem in Iceland, which she called *Varðlokur*.'

"'Then thou art wise in good time,' replied Thorkel."

(Saga Thorfin's Karlsefnis 3)

It is indicative of the unease with which *Heiðni* rituals (and the songs that were sung therein) were viewed by contemporary Christian converts that the young woman initially refused to participate in the recitation of the *Varðlokur*, and had to be persuaded by Thorkel:

She (Gudrid) answered, "This is the only custom at which I will not assist, for I am a Christian woman.'

"Thorbjörg (the *spákona*) added, 'It may be that thou wilt help people herewith and would not be a lesser woman than before (and still would not be lowered by it), and of Thorkel I will ask the things needed.' (Saga Thorfin's Karlsefnis 3)

As with many things in the heathen realm, it's not just good intentions, but the proper and skillful execution of the elements of the ritual, that bring about good results (at the risk of paraphrasing, one could say "better never sung than sung poorly..."):

"Thorkel pressed Gudrid hard, and she consented. The women placed themselves in a ring around the *seiðhjall* on which Thorbjörg sat, and Gudrid sang the song so fair and well that all present thought that they had never heard a finer voice. The *spákona* thanked her, and said that many spirits who had before wanted to depart and give no help had now come, and found pleasure in listening, as the song was so well sung..." (Saga Thorfin's Karlsefnis 3)

These two examples, while from very disparate sources and describing two very different events, do show certain commonalties to be found in *Heiðni* religious rituals. First, songs, or the recitation of poetry, was either an important or vital element of the ritual. Second, their content was very distasteful to contemporary Christians; strongly implying their nature as songs praising the Gods. Third, at least in certain rituals, specific songs were to be recited (as the *Varðlokur* in the case of *seiðr*).

In modern *Heiðni* practice, these principles can be easily and effectively incorporated into the structure of the blót. Before the beginning of the blót itself, an appropriate selection of Eddaic or skaldic poetry would be recited, either by a single individual or in turns by the participants in the ritual. Once the piece was completed, the ritual script could be begun and the ritual proper undertaken.

Sumbel

Sumbel, or the ritual drinking of toasts, is one of the most important aspects of a gathering, and can be the most inspiring element of the celebration. The typical format is for a series of formal toasts to be made to a particular set of Gods by all the

participants, and then less formal toasts, either to the memory of departed ancestors (*minni*), to take an oath (*bragi*), or more simply to honor a favored God or living person may be made as well. It is completely appropriate for toasts made during *sumbel* to be in the form of poetry, but such is certainly not a hard-and-fast requirement.

"Fires were to burn on the middle of the temple floor, and kettles to be put on them [for the cooking of the meat from the sacrifices]; the drinking-horns had to be carried around the fire. The chief who made the feast had to consecrate the horns and all the sacrifice-food. The horn of Óðinn must be drunk first, for the victory and power of their king; and then the horn of Njörd and Freyr, for a good year and peace. Many used to drink Bragi's toast next to these. Men also drank horns for those of their kinsmen who had been great men; these were called *minni*. Sigurd Jarl was a most open-handed man; he did a very famous deed, as he held a great sacrificing feast at Hladir, and himself alone paid all the costs." (Hakon Adalsteinfostri 16)

It should also be noted that the order in which the horns were

drunk can change according to local custom or circumstances;
at a wedding we read:

"When the horn dedicated to Þórr was brought in, Sigurd changed the tune [he had been playing on the harp]; then all that was loose, both knives and plates, began to move; many jumped from their seats and moved to and fro on the floor; and this continued for a long while. Then came the horn dedicated to all the Æsir... When the horn consecrated to Óðinn came, Sigurd opened the harp, which was so large a man could stand upright in it...

When this toast was finished, the toast consecrated to Freyja, which was to be the last, came in..." (Herraud and Bosi's Saga 12)

The most famous account of sumbel occurs in Beowulf; it is there that Beowulf swears a bragi toast to slay the monster Grendel.

-CHAPTER EIGHT- THE TIDES OF THE YEAR

The Lore provides us with a window into a key element of the heathen mind-set in ancient times; the composition of the calendar and its impact on the psychology of those who used it. While a *blót* (pronounced "bloat" and meaning "sacrifice") might be held for any occasion, there were three fixed times of the year at which they were regularly scheduled; at the beginning of winter (*vetrnættir*), midwinter (*jól*), and spring (*sigrblót*), plus several more mobile celebrations. Rather than a neat set of eight regularly-spaced sacred days held on the solstices, equinoxes, and cross-quarters (as is prevalent in modern neo-pagan religions such as Wicca and Ásatrú) seems to have been foreign to the historical Norse practice.

Heimskringla states:

"It is their custom to have a sacrifice in the autumn and welcome the winter, another at mid-winter, the third at the beginning of summer; then they welcome the summer."

(St. Olafs Saga 115)

Thus the Norse calendar was divided into two parts. During the

winter months, when weather prevented such activities as trade, warfare, and agriculture, and men were confined to indoors for the most part, the cycle of religious observances was held. The beginning of winter, mid-winter, and the end of winter are all marked. Once summer returned, the Norse would be able to return to their more active pursuits, and no regular religious observances were to be seen. (This does not, of course, preclude holding sacrifices for specific purposes-- especially victory in battle-- at any time during the year.)

Modern *Heiðinjar* follow this pattern; we celebrate our *blótar* in the winter and engage in more active pursuits (such as holding moots, conducting classes, attending more widespread social gatherings, and practicing our *íþróttir*) during the summer.

It is this sort of duality that infuses the Norse heathen mindset, and similar juxtapositions may be found throughout the Lore. From the clash of fire and ice at the very beginning of the world as recounted in *Voluspa*, to the eternal struggle between the Aesir and Jotunar as representing order and chaos, the concept of dynamically tense opposites is vital to an understanding of the heiðinn mindset.

WINTER-TIDE

During the winter months, the Norsemen would be bound to their halls due to the severe weather, and the cycle of religious observances would take place. Modern Heiðni marks the winter half of the month by five celebrations, held roughly every six weeks:

HYPERLINK \l "VETRARBLOT"[Vetrnætr](#) (Winternights; the beginning-of-winter sacrifice, held in mid-October)

HYPERLINK \l "DISABLOT"[Dísablót](#) (The sacrifice to the Disir, held in late November)

HYPERLINK \l "JOLABLOT"[Jól](#) (Yule, the midwinter sacrifice, held in early January)

HYPERLINK \l "ALFABLOT"[Alfablót](#) (The sacrifice to the Elves, held in mid-February)

HYPERLINK \l "SIGRBLÓT"[Sigrblót](#) (The sacrifice for victory, held in late March)

VETRNÆTTR

Vetrnætr ("winternight") marks the beginning of winter, and is celebrated by holding a vetrarblót (meaning "winter sacrifice") on the 14th of October. Snorri Sturluson's HYPERLINK "../lore/Heimskringla/index.html"[Heimskringla](#) specifically

mentions the celebration's purpose, and describes what went on at the vetrarblót:

"On winter day there should be blood-sacrifice for a good year, and in the middle of winter for a good crop; and the third sacrifice should be on summer day, for victory in battle." (*Ynglinga Saga* 8)

"That autumn the news was told King Olaf from Thrándheim that the Thrands had had great feasts during the winter nights: there had been great drinking. The King was told that all cups were hallowed to the Æsir according to ancient custom. It was also said that cattle and horses were slaughtered there, the altars reddened with blood, and sacrifices made for the bettering of the year." (*St. Olaf's Saga* 113)

The phrase "all cups were hallowed to the Æsir according to ancient custom" refers to taking the horns around the fire. Note also the reference to animal sacrifices; blood from the sacrifices was poured or sprinkled on the altar to "redden" it. The flesh of the animals sacrificed is then eaten at the feast. Note that the Vetrarblót is said to be undertaken "for a good year". The God most closely associated with such prosperity,

and for whom we have definitive evidence of cultic worship, is of course Freyr:

"...and then there were good seasons, in all the land, which the Swedes ascribed to Frey, so that he was more worshipped than the other gods, as the people became much richer in his days by reason of the peace and good seasons." (*Ynglinga Saga 11*)

It is thus not unreasonable to assume that Freyr would be the God honored at the initial sacrifice of the winter.

Ritual Script

While we cannot, of course, know the exact words used during the ancient rituals, we do have a good idea of the general form they followed. What follows is a ritual script based on the ancient model, and using paraphrases and in some instances quotes from the poetry of the Lore. The following items are required for the ritual:

Hörg (altar) made of piled stones. Either permanent or erected especially for the ritual.

Flame. A need-flame (one that has been started by friction) is best.

Hlaut (blood). Swine blood.

Hlautbolli (blood-bowl). To hold the blood.

Hlauttein (blood-twigs). An evergreen sprig used to sprinkle the blood on the worshippers.

Matr (food). If there is no actual animal sacrifice for the ritual, typically pork. Either way, it will later be used as the main course in the *veitsla* (feast) following the blót.

The ritual begins with the worshippers gathered at the altar, with the *goði* and the worshippers facing the altar. Of all the participants, the *goði* especially should be dressed in ritual garb; for the other participants such garb is not required.

Four names of Gods or other wights should be selected to be named in the middle portion of the ritual. Using kennings for such names is appropriate. If you wish to honor only a single deity in a given ritual, then having four different names of the same deity is most acceptable. (Having four names in the ritual is a stylistic, rather than a theological, requirement.)

The Old Norse text should be read aloud; the corresponding English text may be read aloud for the benefit of non-ON speakers, as desired.

Hljóðs bið eg allar
helgar kindir,

meiri og minni
mögu Heimdallar.
Silence I ask
of the sacred folk,
the kith and kin
of Heimdall.

The goði takes the hlaut-bowl and passes it around the flame three times. Each time, he recites the following:

Æsir ok Alfar, helgi hlaut thetta.

Gods and Elves, make this blood holy.

The hlaut-bowl is now placed on the altar. The goði then takes the meat for the feast and passes it around the flame three times. Each time, he recites the following:

Æsir ok Alfar, helgi matr thetta.

Gods and Elves, make this food holy.

The meat is then returned to its place (not on the altar), and may be taken to the kitchen for preparation after the completion of the ritual.

Heill Freyr! Heilr Yngve!
Heil Njörðsson ok Alfheimskon!
Óvreiðom augom lítið okr þinig,

ok gefit sitjaondom sigr.

Hail to Freyr, hail Ingve!

Hail to Njörðs' son and Alfheim's lord!

Look with gracious eyes upon us,
grant us here your blessings.

Heillr Æsir! Heilar Ásynjor,
ok siá in fíal-nýta Fold!

Mál vit okr mærom okr tveim,
ok lækni-hendr meðan lifom!

Hail to the Gods, hail to the Goddesses

Hail to the all-giving earth!

Give unto us wisdom and lore,
and healing hands as long as we live!

The goði then dips the hlautteinn into the hlautbolli and sprinkles the worshippers and himself with the hlaut. He places the hlautteinn on the altar, lifts up the hlautbolli, and pours the remaining hlaut onto the altar.

Hörg hat vit þú goerði hlaðinn steinom;
nú es griót þat at gleri orðit;
rauð hann vit nýjo nauta-blóði;
ae truði ek vit á Æsir ok Alfar.

We made you an altar built of stones;
The grit thereon is made glassy;
We have reddened it with the fresh blood of oxen;
We have ever trusted in the Aesir and Elves.
The ritual is now ended. The hlaut-teinn is left on the altar, the
now-blessed food is brought to the kitchen for the veitsla, and
the assembly returns to the hall. The blót is completed.

DÍSABLÓT

The character of the dísablót varied from place to place within the Norse lands, depending on the influence and nature of the worship of the dísir. In Sweden, the cult of the dísir was quite strong and celebrated publically during the spring at an event called dísaping. A combination sacrificial rite and and public fair, the dísaping was a major holiday in Sweden. Indeed, the dísir are seen here as having a special temple dedicated to them, called the *dísarsal*:

"King Aldis was at a dísablót, and rode on a horse round the dísarsal; his horse stumbled and fell, and the King was thrown off, and his head hit a stone so that it broke and his braids lay on the stone. This caused his death. He

died at Uppsala, and is mound-laid there; the Svear called him a powerful King." (Ynglinga Saga 33)

In Norway and Iceland, however, the *dísablót* was held in what we call late autumn, and apparently was celebrated at night. Of it, the lore tells us:

"One autumn there was a great *dísablót* at King Alf's, and Alfhild went to it; she was more beautiful than any other woman, and all the people in Alfheimar were handsomer than other people at that time; but in the night, as she was redding the *hörg* [altar] with blood, Starkad Aludreng took her away to his home. Then King Alf invoked Þórr to seek for Alfhild, and Þórr killed Starkad, and made Alfhild go home to her father, and Grim the son of Hergrim with her." (Hervarar Saga 1)

"King Eirik Bloodaxe and Gunnhild came the same evening to Atli, where Bard had prepared a great feast for him, and there was to be a *dísablót*. There was much drinking and feasting in the hall. The king asked where Bard was, for he saw him nowhere. A man replied, 'Bard is outside helping his guests.' 'Who are these guests?' inquired the King, 'that he thinks it more his duty to be

there than inside with us?' The man told him they were the servants (*huskarlar*) of Mighty Þórr. The King added, 'Go to them as speedily as possible, and call them in here.' When they came, the King received Ölvir well, and made him sit opposite him in the high-seat, and his men on both sides of him. Egil was next to Ölvir; then ale was brought in, and many memorial toasts [the "Bragi Toast" mentioned above] were drunk, a horn to be emptied at each. As the evening was drawing to a close, many of Ölvir's men became drunk; some of them vomited in the hall, but others went outside." (Egil's Saga 44)

Thus we can see that the standard pattern attributed to the blót holds true; in the first quote we read of the reddening of the altar, and in the second is made ample reference to the feasting and drinking that took place thereafter.

The nature of the Dísir is complex. They are spirits that are associated with particular families or individuals (there is a connection with the Fylgja), and the term "guardian spirit" is possibly the best English description. There are several examples in the Lore of the dísir causing a warrior harm and even death in battle, and even more overtly connecting the

valkyries with the dísir:

It is very dangerous
If you stumble with your foot
when you into battle walk
deceitful dísir on both sides stand
and want to see you wounded.

(Reginismál)

The valkyries' flock from afar she beholds,
Ready to ride to the realm of men:
Skuld held her shield, Skogul likewise,
Guth, Hild, Gondul, and Geirskogul:
For thus are hight Herjan's dises,
Ready to ride o'er reddened battlefields.

(Voluspa)

However, there is also a close connection between Freyja and the Dísir; She is even called Vanadís ("Dís of the Vanir"), and so She is honored in the modern ritual along with the dísir of a more personal nature.

Ritual Script

While we cannot, of course, know the exact words used during the ancient rituals, we do have a good idea of the general form

they followed. What follows is a ritual script based on the ancient model, and using paraphrases and in some instances quotes from the poetry of the Lore. The following items are required for the ritual:

Hörg (altar) made of piled stones. Either permanent or erected especially for the ritual.

Flame. A need-flame (one that has been started by friction) is best.

Hlaut (blood). Swine blood.

Hlaubolli (blood-bowl). To hold the blood.

Hlauttein (bloodtwig). An evergreen sprig used to sprinkle the blood on the worshippers.

Matr (food). If there is no actual animal sacrifice for the ritual, typically pork. Either way, it will later be used as the main course in the *veitsla* (feast) following the *blót*.

The ritual begins with the worshippers gathered at the altar, with the *goði* and the worshippers facing the altar. Of all the participants, the *goði* especially should be dressed in ritual garb; for the other participants such garb is not required.

The Old Norse text should be read aloud; the corresponding English text may be read aloud for the benefit of non-ON

speakers, as desired.

Hljóðs bið eg allar
helgar kindir,
meiri og minni
mögu Heimdallar.
Silence I ask
of the sacred folk,
the kith and kin
of Heimdal.

The goði takes the hlaut-bowl and passes it around the flame three times. Each time, he recites the following:

Æsir ok Alfarr, helgi hlaut thetta.

Gods and Elves, make this blood holy.

The hlaut-bowl is now placed on the altar. The goði then takes the meat for the feast and passes it around the flame three times. Each time, he recites the following:

Æsir ok Alfarr, helgi matr thetta.

Gods and Elves, make this food holy.

The meat is then returned to its place (not on the altar), and may be taken to the kitchen for preparation after the completion of the ritual.

Heill Dísir! Heilr Freyja!
Heil Fylgukona ok valkyrja!
Óvreiðom augom lítið okr þinig,
ok gefit sitjaondom sigr.
Hail to the Dises, hail Freyja!
Hail to the Guardian-Lady and Valkyries!
Look with gracious eyes upon us,
grant us here your blessings.
Heillr Æsir! Heilar Ásynjor,
ok siá in fíal-nýta Fold!
Mál vit okr mærom okr tveim,
ok lækni-hendr meðan lifom!
Hail to the Gods, hail to the Goddesses
Hail to the all-giving earth!
Give unto us wisdom and lore,
and healing hands as long as we live!

The goði then dips the hlautteinn into the hlautbolli and sprinkles the worshippers and himself with the hlaut. He places the hlautteinn on the altar, lifts up the hlautbolli, and pours the remaining hlaut onto the altar.

Hörg hat vit þú goerði hlaðinn steinom;

nú es griót þat at gleri orðit;
rauð hann vit nýjo nauta-blóði;
ae truði ek vit á Æsir ok Alfar.

We made you an altar built of stones;
The grit thereon is made glassy;

We have reddened it with the fresh blood of oxen;

We have ever trusted in the Aesir and Elves.

The ritual is now ended. The hlaut-teinn is left on the altar, the now-blessed food is brought to the kitchen for the veitsla, and the assembly returns to the hall. The blót is completed.

JÓL

Jól, or Yule, was a celebration that traditionally lasted twelve days, starting near what we would call New Year's Day. The jólablót (meaning "Yule sacrifice") was also known as Midsvetrarblót ("mid-winter sacrifice"), and was probably held on January 12th (which is the customary midwinter in Scandinavia), and survives in modern Iceland as the completely secular holiday Thorraþlot. Part of our modern month of January was known as the month of Thor; this blót is particularly associated with Him. The festivities were

specifically observed to encourage the growth of the crops during the coming year (a function closely related to Thor's association with the common men who farm the land, and also his association with the rains and prosperity in general):

"On winter day there should be blood-sacrifice for a good year, and in the middle of winter for a good crop; and the third sacrifice should be on summer day, for victory in battle." (*Ynglinga Saga* 8)

At Yule it is especially customary to lead a boar that has been consecrated to Freyr (known as a *Sónar golt*; "atonement boar") to the feast, and the connections between the boar and Freyr are clear. Upon this boar men make solemn oaths to Freyr, drinking what is known as the "Bragi toast". Several sources describe this:

"King Heidrek had a boar fed; it was as large as the largest bull, but so fine that it seemed as if every hair on it was of gold. He placed one hand on its head and one on its bristles, and made a vow that never should a man transgress so much that he should not have the lawful judgement of his wise men, and these men should take care of the boar, or else he should come with riddles

which the king could not guess." (*Hervarar Saga* 14)

"In the evening vows were made, and the Sónar golt was led forward; the men laid their hands on it and made vows at the Bragi toast." (*Helga Kvida Hjörvardssonar*)

"One winter at Yuletide, when the people were assembled to drink, Finn said, 'Vows will be made in many places this evening, where it is not better to be than here; now I vow that I will serve the king who is the highest and in all things surpass others.'" (*Fornmanna Sögur ii*, 201)

As with all of the blótar, the feast accompanying the holy sacrifice was also the scene of much drinking and comradeship. Heimskringla states:

"Thórodd was with another man at Thórar's. There was a great Yule-feast, the ale being provided by each one himself. There were many besides in the hamlet, who all drank together during Yule. A short way off there was another hamlet. There the brother-in-law of Thórar, a powerful and wealthy man, lived; he had a grown-up son. They were to drink during the half of the Yule at each other's farm, and first at Thórar's." (*St. Olaf's Saga*, 151)

The number of modern Christmas and Yule traditions which

have their origins in the heathen tradition are legion, and well documented. Suffice to say that a Jólablót celebrated with the traditional trappings of an English or American Christmas will be quite heathen in character, indeed.

Ritual Script

While we cannot, of course, know the exact words used during the ancient rituals, we do have a good idea of the general form they followed. What follows is a ritual script based on the ancient model, and using paraphrases and in some instances quotes from the poetry of the Lore. The following items are required for the ritual:

Hörg (altar) made of piled stones. Either permanent or erected especially for the ritual.

Flame. A need-flame (one that has been started by friction) is best.

Hlaut (blood). Beef blood.

Hlaubolli (blood-bowl). To hold the blood.

Hlauttein (bloodtwig). An evergreen sprig used to sprinkle the blood on the worshippers.

Matr (food). If there is no actual animal sacrifice for the ritual, typically beef of some sort. Either way, it will later be used as

the main course in the veitsla (feast) following the blót.

The ritual begins with the worshippers gathered at the altar, with the goði and the worshippers facing the altar. Of all the participants, the goði especially should be dressed in ritual garb; for the other participants such garb is not required.

The Old Norse text should be read aloud; the corresponding English text may be read aloud for the benefit of non-ON speakers, as desired.

Hljóðs bið eg allar
helgar kindir,
meiri og minni
mögu Heimdallar.
Silence I ask
of the sacred folk,
the kith and kin
of Heimdal.

The goði takes the hlaut-bowl and passes it around the flame three times. As he does so, he recites the following:

Æsir ok Alfar, helgi hlaut thetta.

Gods and Elves, make this blood holy.

The hlaut-bowl is now placed on the altar. The goði then takes

the meat for the feast and passes it around the flame three times. As he does so, he recites the following:

Æsir ok Alfar, helgi matr thetta.

Gods and Elves, make this food holy.

The meat is then returned to its place (not on the altar), and may be taken to the kitchen for preparation after the completion of the ritual.

Heill Þórr! Heilr Þokk!

Heil Jörmundgandsbani ok Etinsbani!

Óvreiðom augom lítið okr þinig,

ok gefit sitjaondom sigr.

Hail to Thor! Hail Thunderer!

Hail to Jormundgand's Bane and the Slayer-of-Etins!

Look with gracious eyes upon us,

grant us here your blessings.

Heillr Æsir! Heilar Ásynjor,

ok siá in fílaol-nýta Fold!

Mál vit okr mærom okr tveim,

ok lækni-hendr meðan lifom!

Hail to the Gods, hail to the Goddesses

Hail to the all-giving earth!

Give unto us wisdom and lore,
and healing hands as long as we live!

The goði then dips the hlautteinn into the hlautbolli and sprinkles the worshippers and himself with the hlaut. He places the hlautteinn on the altar, lifts up the hlautbolli, and pours the remaining hlaut onto the altar.

Hörg hat vit þú goerði hlaðinn steinom;
nú es griót þat at gleri orðit;
rauð hann vit nýjo nauta-blóði;
ae truði ek vit á Æsir ok Alfar.

We made you an altar built of stones;
The grit thereon is made glassy;
We have reddened it with the fresh blood of oxen;
We have ever trusted in the Aesir and Elves.

The ritual is now ended. The hlaut-teinn is left on the altar, the now-blessed food is brought to the kitchen for the veitsla, and the assembly returns to the hall. The blót is completed.

ALFABLÓT

Alfablót is most often celebrated in the confines of the home, rather than at a central temple. Thus, it would not be celebrated

by any sort of priest or chieftain, but rather by the individual household (most likely by the head of the household). There is no reason to suspect that the basic format was any different than the more public blótar, but it was apparently a much more private affair, at which strangers were unwelcome.

Heimskringla tells us:

"Then they [the messengers of King Olaf Haraldsson] went through Gautland, and one evening came to a farm called Hof. The door was shut and they could not enter; the husband and wife said it was holy there, and they went away. Then they came to another farm; the housewife stood at the door and asked them not to go in, saying they were holding alfablót. Sigvat [an Icelandic skald traveling with the group] sang--

PRIVATEDo not go farther in, I fear the wrath of Óðinn,

Wretched man; We are heathens. (Olaf's Saga 92)

The fact that the alfablót was being held in the home tells us that it is intimately connected with the everyday personal religion as it was practiced (there are parallels to the cult of the Lares in ancient Rome), while the fact that more than one home was celebrating the alfablót at the same time indicates

that it did not fall into the category of *ad hoc* blótar; it was one tied to the calendar. Unfortunately, no indication of the exact timing of the alfablót survives, save that it was celebrated sometime during the winter. Its timing should therefore be determined by local preference, pending new insights into the matter.

The exact nature of the Alfar (elves) is quite complex. They are related to the Æsir, and are renowned as craftsmen. They are magical creatures, and are well connected with the God Freyr (who is sometimes referred to as the lord of the Alfar, as their land Alfheim was given to him as a tooth-gift). Yet they are "earthier" beings than the Gods, and are much more connected to the mortal world. The Alfar could be called upon to provide healing, as Thordis told Thorvard after the former had been wounded in his battle with Kormak:

"A short distance from here there is a hill, in which Alfar live. Thou must get the bull, which Kormak killed, and with its blood redden the outside of the hill, and make a feast for the Alfar of the meat, and thou wilt recover."

(Kormak's saga 22)

The comparisons with the other sorts of blótar are obvious; the

reddening of the sacred place with the *hlaut*, and the preparation of the sacred feast.

Ritual Script

While we cannot, of course, know the exact words used during the ancient rituals, we do have a good idea of the general form they followed. What follows is a ritual script based on the ancient model, and using paraphrases and in some instances quotes from the poetry of the Lore. The following items are required for the ritual:*Hörg* (altar) made of piled stones. Either permanent or erected especially for the ritual.

Flame. A need-flame (one that has been started by friction) is best.

Hlaut (blood). Either beef, pork, or horse blood.

Hlautbolli (blood-bowl). To hold the blood.

Hlauttein (blood-twigg). An evergreen sprig used to sprinkle the blood on the worshippers.

Matr (food). If there is no actual animal sacrifice for the ritual, typically meat from the same sort of animal whose blood is being used as the hlaut. Either way, it will later be used as the main course in the veitsla (feast) following the blót.

The ritual begins with the worshippers gathered at the altar,

with the goði and the worshippers facing the altar. Of all the participants, the goði especially should be dressed in ritual garb; for the other participants such garb is not required. Four names of Gods or other wights should be selected to be named in the middle portion of the ritual. Using kennings for such names is appropriate. If you wish to honor only a single deity in a given ritual, then having four different names of the same deity is most acceptable. (Having four names in the ritual is a stylistic, rather than a theological, requirement.) The Old Norse text should be read aloud; the corresponding English text may be read aloud for the benefit of non-ON speakers, as desired.

Hljóðs bið eg allar
helgar kindir,
meiri og minni
mögu Heimdallar.
Silence I ask
of the sacred folk,
the kith and kin
of Heimdall.

The goði takes the hlaut-bowl and passes it around the flame

three times. Each time, he recites the following:

Æsir ok Alfarn, helgi hlaut thetta.

Gods and Elves, make this blood holy.

The hlaut-bowl is now placed on the altar. The goði then takes the meat for the feast and passes it around the flame three times. Each time, he recites the following:

Æsir ok Alfarn, helgi matr thetta.

Gods and Elves, make this food holy.

The meat is then returned to its place (not on the altar), and may be taken to the kitchen for preparation after the completion of the ritual.

Heill Alfarn! Heilr Freyrsfolk!

Heil ljossalfarn ok svartalfarn!

Óvreiðom augom lítið okk þínig,
ok gefit sitjaondom sigr.

Hail to the Elves, hail Freyrs folk!

Hail to the light-elves and dark-elves!

Look with gracious eyes upon us,
grant us here your blessings.

Heillr Æsir! Heilar Ásynjor,
ok siá in fíal-nýta Fold!

Mál vit okr mærom okr tveim,
ok lækni-hendr meðan lifom!

Hail to the Gods, hail to the Goddesses

Hail to the all-giving earth!

Give unto us wisdom and lore,
and healing hands as long as we live!

The goði then dips the hlautteinn into the hlautbolli and sprinkles the worshippers and himself with the hlaut. He places the hlautteinn on the altar, lifts up the hlautbolli, and pours the remaining hlaut onto the altar.

Hörg hat vit þú goerði hlaðinn steinom;
nú es griót þat at gleri orðit;
rauð hann vit nýjo nauta-blóði;
ae truði ek vit á Æsir ok Alfar.

We made you an altar built of stones;

The grit thereon is made glassy;

We have reddened it with the fresh blood of oxen;

We have ever trusted in the Aesir and Elves.

The ritual is now ended. The hlaut-teinn is left on the altar, the now-blessed food is brought to the kitchen for the veitsla, and the assembly returns to the hall. The blót is completed.

SIGRBLÓT

The sigrblót (which means "victory sacrifice") was held in mid-April as a sacrifice to obtain victory and good luck in the coming spring and summer months (when both warfare and Víking raids would take place). It marks the end of the winter cycle of religious observances, and the beginning of the summer cycle of active pursuits (such as farming, trading, raiding, warfare, *usw.*)

"They were used to holding sacrifices before the winter to the Anse, and at mid-winter for the crop, and the third when summer began; that was a Sigr-blót." (*Ynglinga Saga* 8)

It was held in honor of Óðinn, who was traditionally the giver of victory in battle:

"Dag, son of Högni, made a sacrifice to Óðinn to avenge his father; Óðinn lent his spear to him. Dag met his brother-in-law Helgi [who had killed Högni] at the place called Fjoturlund, he pierced him with the spear, and Helgi fell there." (*Helga kvida Hundingsbana II*)

"When he [Hakon Jarl] had sailed eastward as far as the

Gauta Skerries, he went ashore and made a great sacrifice. Two ravens, which croaked loudly, flew towards him, and the jarl thought that Óðinn must have accepted the sacrifice and that he would have a good chance of victory." (*Fornmanna Sögur i*)

This blót takes its name from the fact that in many instances the summer was when wars were fought and commercial enterprises undertaken. This is in keeping with the dualistic nature of the heathen world-view; this sacrifice marks the end of the winter period of inactivity and the beginning of the summer period of action. To do so with the blessings of the Gods and having asked for the granting of success and victory makes perfect sense.

Ritual Script

While we cannot, of course, know the exact words used during the ancient rituals, we do have a good idea of the general form they followed. What follows is a ritual script based on the ancient model, and using paraphrases and in some instances quotes from the poetry of the Lore. The following items are required for the ritual:

Hörg (altar) made of piled stones. Either permanent or erected

especially for the ritual.

Flame. A need-flame (one that has been started by friction) is best.

Hlaut (blood). Horse blood (if available; swine or beef is otherwise acceptable).

Hlautbolli (blood-bowl). To hold the blood.

Hlauttein (bloodtwig). An evergreen sprig used to sprinkle the blood on the worshippers.

Matr (food). If there is no actual animal sacrifice for the ritual, typically horse meat (or pork or beef). Either way, it will later be used as the main course in the *veitsla* (feast) following the *blót*.

The ritual begins with the worshippers gathered at the altar, with the *goði* and the worshippers facing the altar. Of all the participants, the *goði* especially should be dressed in ritual garb; for the other participants such garb is not required.

Four names of Gods or other wights should be selected to be named in the middle portion of the ritual. Using kennings for such names is appropriate. If you wish to honor only a single deity in a given ritual, then having four different names of the same deity is most acceptable. (Having four names in the ritual

is a stylistic, rather than a theological, requirement.)

The Old Norse text should be read aloud; the corresponding English text may be read aloud for the benefit of non-ON speakers, as desired.

Hljóðs bið eg allar
helgar kindir,
meiri og minni
mögu Heimdallar.
Silence I ask
of the sacred folk,
the kith and kin
of Heimdall.

The goði takes the hlaut-bowl and passes it around the flame three times. Each time, he recites the following:

Æsir ok Alfar, helgi hlaut thetta.

Gods and Elves, make this blood holy.

The hlaut-bowl is now placed on the altar. The goði then takes the meat for the feast and passes it around the flame three times. Each time, he recites the following:

Æsir ok Alfar, helgi matr thetta.

Gods and Elves, make this food holy.

The meat is then returned to its place (not on the altar), and may be taken to the kitchen for preparation after the completion of the ritual.

Heill Óðinn! Heilr Einauga!

Heil Sigtýr ok farmagód!

Óvreiðom auga lítið okr þinig,

ok gefit sitjaondom sigr.

Hail Odin! Hail One-Eye!

Hail to the Victory-God and the God of Cargoes!

Look with gracious eye upon us,

grant us here your blessings.

Heillr Æsir! Heilar Ásynjor,

ok siá in fíal-nýta Fold!

Mál vit okr mærom okr tveim,

ok lækni-hendr meðan lifom!

Hail to the Gods, hail to the Goddesses

Hail to the all-giving earth!

Give unto us wisdom and lore,

and healing hands as long as we live!

The goði then dips the hlautteinn into the hlautbolli and sprinkles the worshippers and himself with the hlaut. He places

the hlautteinn on the altar, lifts up the hlautbolli, and pours the remaining hlaut onto the altar.

Hörg hat vit þú goerði hlaðinn steinom;
nú es griót þat at gleri orðit;
rauð hann vit nýjo nauta-blóði;
ae truði ek vit á Æsir ok Alfar.

We made you an altar built of stones;
The grit thereon is made glassy;

We have reddened it with the fresh blood of oxen;

We have ever trusted in the Aesir and Elves.

The ritual is now ended. The hlaut-teinn is left on the altar, the now-blessed food is brought to the kitchen for the veitsla, and the assembly returns to the hall. The blót is completed.

SUMMER-TIDE

Once the winter has passed, just as the ancient Norsemen would begin their more active pursuits; farming, trading, raiding, and so on, so too do we modern Heiðinjar go forth and hold more purely social gatherings, as well, held roughly every seven weeks:

Varþing (the spring assembly, held in mid May)

Alþing (the grand assembly, held in mid-late June)

Leið (the late-summer assembly, held in mid August)

In modern Heiðni, and since Viking raids are few and far between nowadays, we spend our summers indulging in the practice and mastery of what are known as *íþróttir*. Íþróttir (sing. íþrótt, and pronounced "eethroteer") were, collectively, those skills that were considered necessary or desirable for a Norseman to possess and master. Often, friendly (and not-so friendly) contests of íþróttir were held to test the mettle of friends and guests. One's mastery of various íþróttir was often a matter for boasting:

"I know eight íþróttir:

I have sometimes practiced swimming;

I can make the drink of Ygg [poetry];

I can run on snow-shoes;

I can ride fast on a horse;

I shoot and I row well enough."

(Ólafs Saga Tryggvasonar 206)

We see here that a mix of intellectual and physical idróttir were valued. Such laundry-lists of idróttir were not uncommon:

"King Olaf was in every spect, of all the men who have

been spoken of, the greatest man of íþróttir in Norway; he was the strongest and most skilled of all, and many accounts of this have been written. One is about how he climbed Smalsarhorn and fastened his shield on the top of the rock... He could fight equally well with both hands, and shoot two spears at once." (Olaf Tryggvason's Saga 85)

"Magnus exercised himself and was skilled in many games and íþróttir even in his youth; he walked along the gunwales as young men used to do at that time, and he did it with great nimbleness, and showed his accomplishments in this as in other things." (Magnus the Good's Saga vi. 5)

"Olaf was a great man of íþróttir in many respects, highly skilled in the use of the bow and spear, a good swimmer, expert and of good judgement in all handicrafts, whether his own or others. Olaf Haraldsson was eager in games and wanted to be the first, as was fitting for his rank and birth." (St. Olaf's saga 3)

"One day King Olaf talked to Sigmund in the spring, and said 'We will amuse ourselves today, and try our skill.' 'I

am very unfit to do that, lord,' said Sigmund, 'though this shall, like other things that I can do, be as you wish.' Then they tried swimming and shooting and other íþróttir, though he was surpassed by the king in them all, but nevertheless nearer to him than any other man in Norway." (Færeyinga Saga 28-32)

Thus, we begin to get a feel for what were considered the idróttir of the Viking age, physical and mental:

Acrobatics (and other feats of dexterity)

Archery

Board-games (tafl, *usw.*)

Falconry

"Handicrafts" (such as wood-carving, pottery, painting, jewelry-making)

Horsemanship

Music (harp, lyre, horns, *usw.*)

Riddling

Rock-climbing

Rowing

Skaldship (poetry)

Skiing

Spearmanship (particularly spear-throwing)

Swimming

Swordsmanship

Wrestling (modern day glíma)

In modern Heiðni, the practice and mastery of various íþróttir is an important part of non-religious life. Much like modern Society for Creative Anachronism "fighter practices" and "archery practices", Heiðinjar get together for "ídróttir practices" on weekends and at other times. While they may be similar in form to role-playing activities, however, there the parallel ends. This is most emphatically not an exercise in role-playing; there are no "personas", no armor made of plastic barrels. We study the íþróttir as a religious duty; an incredibly fun one, admittedly, but a duty nonetheless. By learning as much as we can about the everyday life of the Norse during the Víking Age, we gain an ever-greater understanding of the faith that we share with them. The study and mastery of the íþróttir is merely one more way to bring ourselves closer to them, like learning Old Norse and pillaging monestaries (well, maybe not that last).

-CHAPTER NINE- THE TIDES OF LIFE

Heiðinjar, as all people, mark the special events of a lifetime, usually with a small (but sometimes quite elaborate) ceremony that recalls the specialness of the occasion. Beginning at birth, through the giving of the gift accompanying the first tooth, forging life-long friendships of foster-brotherhood, marriage, beginning the cycle of birth again, and finally death, the tides of life are celebrated in particular heiðinn fashion.

BJARG ("BIRTH")

In the Heiðni way of life, families—and therefore children—are of paramount importance. The rites that accompany the birth and of a new member of the family are therefore of great importance.

It was often said that the Nornir themselves looked on at the birth of a child, and the Lore tells us of their actual physical presence at the beginning of a particularly illustrious life, such as Helgi son of Borghild. Sigrdrífumál describes *bjargrúnar*, which are said to help in making the birth itself easy on the mother:

"I'll teach you lore for helping
women in labor,
runes to release the child;
write them on your palms
and grasp her wrists
invoking the Disir's aid."

The Disir are minor protective Goddesses, often associated with a particular family. It was also not unknown to invoke the Goddesses and Gods through prayer (in the form of kvæði, or song/poetry) to assist with a hard birth.

"Borgný, a king's daughter, could not be delivered of her child before Oddrún, the sister of Atli, came to help her.

And then Borgný says,

‘Thus may help you
the kind powers
Frigg and Freyja
and more Gods
as you did take
the danger from my hands.’"

(Oddrúnargrát)

NAFNFESTI ("NAME FASTENING")

The Heiðni custom of sprinkling water on a newborn child is well attested in the Lore, and is distinct from the Christian custom of similar form. Apparently the two customs were derived independently of one another, as there were two distinct terms for the rites; to distinguish the Heathen from the Christian water-sprinkling, the Christian ceremony was referred to as *skirn*, while the Heiðni ceremony was *ausa vatni*. That they were not regarded as the same or even similar we have proof, as the *ausa vatni* was not recognized by the Christians.

Along with the sprinkling of water, the child was also given a name. Apparently, the ceremony was a simple one, and was completed almost immediately after the birth itself.

"It was then the custom to choose the best men to water-sprinkle and give names to the children of high-born men. When the time came at which Thora expected to bear her child, she wished to go and find King Harald. He was then north at Söheim, while she was at Mostr; she went northward on Sigurd Jarl's ship. During the night they lay to near the shore, and Thora bore a son upon the rock at the end of the

bridge. Sigurd Jarl water-sprinkled the boy, and called him Hákon, after his father, Hakon Hlada Jarl."

(Harald Hárfagr's Saga 40).

"At that time Gunnhild bore a son, and Harald [Fairhair, the King] water-sprinkled him and gave him his own name, therewith declaring that he should be king after his father [Eirik, Harald's own son] if he should live."

(Egil's Saga 59)

Often, the child is named after an illustrious ancestor or even the name-giver himself. The act of bestowing a name on the child is considered an act of gift-giving, not least because the luck of the child's namesake is considered to follow the child through its life, and thus some continuity of the spiritual essence of the family is retained.

"Thórólf [as he lay dying] said, 'I will tell thee. It seems to me my nae has not existed long enough, and it will disappear as withered grass, and I shall never be mentioned when you are dead; but I see that you will increase our kin, and live a long time. You will be

a man of great luck. If you should get a son, I want you to give him the name of Thórólf, and all the luck which I have had I will give to him, for thus I believe my name will live while the world is inhabited.'

Thorstein [his brother] answered, 'I will grant you this willingly, for I expect it to be to our honor, and good luck will follow your name while it remains in our family.'

Thórólf added, 'Now I think I have asked what seems most important to me.' And then he died."

(Svarfdæla Saga 5)

"Thorstein [a different Thorstein than above] had a son by his wife, and when the boy was born, he was brought to his father. Thorstein looked at him and said, 'That boy shall be named Ingimund, after the father of his mother, and I expect him to be lucky on account of his name.'"

(Vatnsdæla Saga 7)

When a child is dedicated to a particular God or Goddess (which is not required, but certainly permitted), the name of that deity or a form thereof is often appended to the

name of the child.

"Thórólf in his old age married Unn, and by her had a son named Stein. This boy Thórólf dedicated to his friend Thór, and h was therefore called Thórstein."

(Eyrbyggja Saga 7)

"Thorstein was married to Thóra, and by her had a son, who was water-sprinkled and named Grim. His father gave him to Thor, saying he would become hofgoði; he was on that account called Thorgrim."

(Eyrbyggja Saga 20)

It is customary not only for a person of high rank and renown to perform the name-fastening ceremony, but also that a gift of some sort accompanies the rite. Such a name-fastening gift should traditionally consist of wealth, weapons, or both.

"The time arrived when she (Kráka) was confined and bore a son, whom the servant maids took and showed to her. She bade them carry him to Ragnar [Lodbrok], and let him see him; the boy was taken into the hall and placed in the fold of Ragnar's cloak. When he saw the boy, Ragnar was asked what he should be named.

He sang;

**Sigurd shall the boy be named,
he will fight battles
and be much like his mother,
and be called his father's son;
he will of Odin's family
the foremost man be called;
that serpent is in his eye
which another slew.**

**He drew a gold ring from his hand, and gave it to the
boy as name-fastening."**

(Ragnar Lodbrok's Saga 8)

**"Hlöd, the son of King Heidrek, was brought up with
King Humli, his mother's father, and was the most
handsome and bold of men. But it was an old saying at
that time that a man was born with weapons or
horses; this was said about the weapons that were
made at the time the man was born. Also sheep,
animals, oxen or horses, if born at that time, were
given to high-born men in their honor..."**

(Hervarar Saga 13)

TANNFÉ ("TOOTH-FEE")

It is customary to present gifts to a child when it cuts its first tooth (i.e., when the first tooth appears through the gums). This was a custom practiced both by the Gods and men.

**"The Gods in days of yore
gave to Freyr
Alfheim as a tooth-fee."**

(Grimnismál 4)

"Ásta, Gudbrand's daughter, bore a boy who was named Olaf when he was water-sprinked by Hrani. It was said by some that Gudbrand would not let him be raised on account of the hatred he had against his father [Harald Grænski], until Hrani told him that he had seen light over the house in which the child was born. Gudbrand himself went to look at it. Then the boy was taken and brought up with great love. Hrani gave him a belt and a knife as a tooth-fee, and when he grew up he gave him a ring and a sword."

(Saint Olaf's Saga 4)

Nor are males the only recipients of such gifts. The same

customs apply to girl-children as well.

"[Olaf Tryggvason said to Thyri, his queen] Now you need not weep, for you have gotten back your possessions in Vindland, but I shall today claim your tooth-fee from King Svein your brother, which you have often asked me to do."

(Saint Olaf's Saga 4)

Children, being the continuation of the line not only of the family, but of the tribe and Folk as a whole as well, should indeed have a paramount place in the hearts and minds of modern Heiðinjar. While it is of course understandable that some couples would be unable to have children for legitimate medical reasons, many of the excuses that modern people make to avoid raising families should be foreign to the heiðinn mindset. It is through the raising of our children that we enjoy a certain immortality, and it is through the quality of our children that we ourselves are often known. Any burden that children may present are more than made up for by the boons and joy they bring with them.

KNÉSETJA ("KNEE-SITTING")

In ancient times, it was customary to have one's children raised not at home, but by a special foster-father (or mother). The bond between foster-child and foster-parents was as close as that between biological children and parents (if not closer!), and the fosterers were bound to treat their foster-charges as their own children. The formal fostering ceremony was simple, and involved sitting the child on the knee of the foster-father.

"Harald [Gormsson] took Harald, son of Eirik [Bloodaxe] to raise him, and knee-seated him; he was raised in his house." (Fornmanna Sogur I, 19)

The choice of foster-father for one's child was significant socially, as the fosterer was generally regarded to be someone of lower social standing than the father.

"Höskuld, an Icelandic goði, having died and his sons having held arvel after him, one of these, Thorleik by name, was jealous of his stepbrother Olaf, whose mother was Malkorka, an Irish king's daughter, who had been bought as a thrall by Höskuld. To conciliate him, Olaf offered to foster Thorleik's son, saying, 'I will foster thy son, for he is always called a lesser man

who fosters the child of another." (Laxdæla Saga 27)

The duties of the fosterer were the same as if his charge were his own child. He was expected to educate the foster-child, preparing him for life in the world (and the success of the foster-child was in no small way a reflection on the quality and character of the fosterer, who could expect to be just as proud of a successful foster-son as the actual father).

"It is told that Hjördis gave birth to a boy, and he was carried to King Hjalprek. He was glad when he saw the flashing eyes in his head, and said no one would be his equal, and he was water-sprinkled with the name Sigurd; all people say the same of him, that in vigor and size no man was his equal. He was brought up by Hjalprek with great affection. When all the famous men and kings in the old sagas are named, Sigurd will be foremost in strength and accomplishments, energy and valor, which he had in a higher degree than any other man in the northern half of the world. Sigurd grew up there with Hjalprek, and every child loved him; he betrothed Hjördis to King alf, and fixed her

mund. The foster-father of Sigurd was Regin, son of Hreidmar; he taught him íþróttir, tafl, and runes, and to speak many tongues, as then was the custom with kings' sons, and many other things." (Völsunga Saga 13)

In modern practice, such full-time fostering is not practical. However, children may still be called knésetningr of a foster-father. Such fosterers are roughly equivalent to modern Christian godparents, but with the duty to educate the child in the Heiðinn faith and íþróttir. Such fosterers may take their charge for a week, or perhaps for several weekends during the year, and naturally maintain a close relationship for life. The responsibilities attending such fosterage is a very serious thing, and cannot lightly be set aside.

And yet, when all was said and done, children's play even a thousand years ago was remarkably like that of today.

"The boys Guthorm and Hálfván, Ásta's sons, were playing with large boer and barns, cattle and sheep, which they themselves had made [i.e., wooden toys]. Harald was a short way off at a muddy creek of the

lake with many chips of wood floating on the water. Olaf asked him what they were for. He said they were his war ships. The king laughed and said, 'It may be, kinsman, you will rule ships in time to come.' (This boy was Harald Hardradi)." (Saint Olaf's Saga 75)

FÓSTBRÆÐRA (FOSTER-BROTHERHOOD)

The Lore is replete with accounts of two valiant individuals so admiring one another's bravery and spirit as to become foster-brothers. The foster-brother (also known as blood-brothers) arrangement involves not only the commitment to stand by each other through tough times, but also to avenge each other's death. The bonds between foster-brothers are betimes stronger than those between biological brothers. The vow to avenge the death of the other was central to the foster-brotherhood:

"They [Orm Storólfsson and Ásbjörn Þrudi] soon became friends and tried many iþróttir; they swore each other foster-brotherhood according to ancient custom, that the one who lived the longest should avenge the other, if he was slain in battle."
(Fornmanna Sögur 111)

"In olden times, it had been the custom of valiant men, who made the agreement between themselves, that the one who lived the longest should avenge the other; that they should walk under three jardarmen [strips of turf], and that was their oath." (Fóstbræðra Saga 1)

The ceremony to enact the foster-brotherhood is both simple and profound:

"It was done thus: three long slices of turf were to be cut up; their ends were to be fastened to the ground, and the loops raised to high that a man could go under them." (Fóstbræðra Saga 1)

It is not unknown for more than two people to join as foster brothers, and also that the attendant ceremony can be sometimes slightly more elaborate:

"[Gisli said] 'I think it right that we should bind our friendship still closer than before, and we four swear one another foster-brotherhood.' To this they consented, and went on Eyrarhvalsoddi, and there cut from the ground a loop of turf, both ends being attached to the ground, and under this they placed a

spear inlaid with ornaments, so long that a man could reach with his hand to the spear-nail [the nail that holds the spearhead to the shaft]. Under this were to go the four, Thorgrim, Gisli, Thorkel, and Véstein. They then drew blood from themselves, and let it run together into the mould, which had been cut under the loop of turf, and mixed together the earth and the blood; thereupon they all fell on their knees and swore an oath that each should avenge the other like a brother, and called all the Gods as witnesses. They all shook hands." (Gisli Súrsson's Saga 1)

"They let blood flow from the hollow of their hands, and went under a sod, and swore oaths that each one should avenge the other, if any one of them was slain with weapons." (Thorstein Vikingsson 21)

Often, even foes will offer one another foster-brotherhood as a means of stilling their differences, and sometimes the foster-brotherhood of a man of renown is considered quite a prize:

"[Angantýr and Beli were fighting, when Beli's friend Thorstein intervened and said,] 'I think it right,

Angantýr, that you should stop fighting, for I see that Beli is exhausted, and I will not be so mean as to help him against you, but if you become his slayer I will challenge you to hólmgang, and I think we are not less unequal than you and Beli; I would kill you in that hólmgang, and it would be a great loss if both of you were to die. Now will I offer you this condition, if you give Beli his life, that we swear each other foster-brotherhood.' Angantýr said, 'It seems to be a fair offer, that I become the foster-brother of Beli, but it is a great boon for me to become your foster-brother.' This was then agreed upon." (Thorstein Vikingsson 21)

Sometimes the oath of foster-brotherhood stipulate that property is held in common by the brothers, but this is not a requirement:

"After this they swore themselves into foster-brotherhood, and to own everything by halves." (Sörla Þátt 6)

"Aran said to Asmund, 'We will not try our skill at weapons, for that would be to the injury of us both. I

should like to swear to each other foster-brotherhood, that each shall avenge the other, and possess in common property gotten and ungotten.' They also took oaths that whoever lived the longest should have a mound thrown up over the other, and place therein as much property as seemed to him befitting, and the survivor had to sit with the dead one in the mound for three nights, and then depart, if he liked. Then both drew their blood and let it flow together; this was then regarded as an oath." (Egil and Asmund's Saga 6)

The bond of foster-brotherhood (and in modern times this can naturally include foster-sisterhood) is, aside from marriage and taking in a foster-child, the most profound and enduring decisions that can be entered into. Hardly something to be lightly entered into, it is more than an affirmation of friendship, but a mingling of orlög and family, and an entering into of oaths that cannot be lightly set aside.

BRÚÐHLAUP (WEDDINGS)

Descriptions of several weddings and wedding-feasts (and the preparations therefor) are handed down to us from the

Sagas and the Poetic Edda, as well as details of the laws concerning marriage. Marriage in general was not considered so much a religious as a civil institution, although certain parts of the process were definitely religious in nature. Much attention was paid to the division and control of the property of the couple, on both sides of the marriage compact, and laws regarding the division of such property were specific and complex.

In general, the wedding follows the following steps:

HYPERLINK \l "brúð-kaup">[Brúð-kaup](#). Permission is sought for the groom to take the hand of the bride, and the economic contributions that each party is making to the marriage is agreed upon.

HYPERLINK \l "festar">[Festar](#). The man and the woman are engaged to one another. This may last up to one year.

HYPERLINK \l "brúðhlaup">[Brúðhlaup](#). The bride and groom are actually wedded to one another, accompanied by a feast.

HYPERLINK \l "hjón">[Hjón](#). The bride and groom are now husband and wife.

A marriage that does not go through the full procedure is

called *skyndibrúðhlaup* ("hasty wedding") or *lausa-brúðhlaup* ("loose wedding") and is not legal. The children of such a marriage are considered illegitimate and thus can not receive any inheritance.

BRÚÐ-KAUP (BRIDE-BUYING)

The negotiations leading up to the wedding itself are often the most interesting and complex aspect of the entire wedding process.

It is possible for the couple to choose each other (out of love or for mutual economic or social benefit), or for the marriage to be arranged by the parents (of course, in modern times, such arranged marriages are rarely, if ever, done). Once the groom has selected his intended bride, the suitor visits her father or guardian on what is called a *bonordsför* (wooing-journey). He is accompanied by his father, his best friends, and a retinue of his followers (assuming he has a retinue, that is). *Njál's Saga* describes the bargaining process:

"Njál once said to his son Helgi, 'I have thought of a match for thee, kinsman, if thou wilt follow my advice.' 'Certainly I will,' he said, 'for I know both

that thou meanest it well and knowest well how to act; but what is it?' 'We will ask in marriage the daughter of Asgrim Ellidagrimsson, for she is the best match.' Shortly afterwards they rode out across the [river] Thjórsá, until they came to Tunga. Asgrim was at home, and received them well, and they stayed there over night. The next day they proceeded to talk the matter over. Njál opened the subject, and asked for the hand of Thorhalla for his son Helgi. Asgrim received this well, and said that with no man was he more desirous to bargain than with them. They then talked about the matter, and at last Asgrim betrothed his daughter to Helgi, and the wedding feast was agreed upon." (Njál's Saga 26, 27)

Although matches wherein the feelings of the bride were paramount were also known:

"They [Björn, who wants the hand of Oddny, and Skúli his kinsman] came to Hjörsey, and saw Thorkel and his daughter Oddny. Björn then told him the state of his feelings, and asked Oddny in marriage. Thorkel took it well, and referred it altogether to his

daughter's decision. As Björn was known to her before, and they had loved each other very fondly, she consented." (Björn Hitdælakappi's Saga)

It is customary that some spokesman present the case for the groom, rather than the groom himself, and witnesses are called to make fast the conditions of the marriage:

"Rut [who sought the hand of Mörd's daughter Unn] then said to Mörd, 'You may think, bondi, that my brother has spoken so highly of me because he loves me, but if you will take the matter into consideration, I want you to state your conditions.' Mörd answered, 'I have thought of the conditions. She shall have 60 hundreds, and it shall be increased with one-third from they farm, but if you have an heir each of you shall have the half.' Rut said, 'These conditions I accept; and now let us have witnesses.'" (Njál's Saga 2)

It is not unknown for the groom to speak for himself, however:

"Grimkel, a goði, said, 'I am told for certain, Valbrand, that thou hast a faughter called Signy, who is very accomplished; I want to ask her in marriage, if

though wilt marry her to me.' Valbrand answered, 'It is known to us that though art of good kin and art wealthy, and a great champion; I will give a favorable answer to this.'" (Hörd's Saga 3)

The key to the marriage being regarded as legitimate (as well as the children of the couple!) is the *mund*. Mund is a term that refers both to the collective terms agreed to by the families of the bride and the groom, as well as specifically referring to the property paid by the groom:

"The man whose mother is not bought with mund, with a mark or still more property, or not wedded, or not betrothed, is not inheritance-born [i.e., legitimate and able to inherit the property of his family]. A woman is bought with mund when a mark consisting of *aurar*, of the value of 12 feet of *vadmal* [cloth], or more property, is paid or stipulated by hand-shaking." (Grágas i. 75)

Both the bride and the groom are expected to contribute to the financial success of the new couple. The bride's contribution is called the *heimanfylgja*, which means home-following, and is most often contributed by her family or

guardians. The groom is then expected to contribute the *tilgjöf*, or "counter-gift". As a rule, the *tilgjöf* is one-third of the *heimanfylgja*. The husband is also expected to give his wife a *linfé* ("linen-fee") during the wedding itself. Once the preliminary negotiations are concluded, the betrothal ceremony itself can take place.

FESTAR (THE BETROTHAL)

Once all of these preliminaries are concluded, the man and woman are considered to be *festarmadr* and *festarkona* (betrothed-man and betrothed-woman), respectively. The legal formula for the *festar* is handed down to us:

"A woman is betrothed according to law if a man recites the agreement about the *mund*; then the *giptingar-man* [the person who is giving away the bride; usually the father or guardian] and the man to whom the woman is betrothed shall name witnesses to it. The man who is betrothed shall say: 'We name witnesses that thou _____ betroth thyself to me _____ with a lawful betrothal, and givest me the *heimanfylgja* with *handsal* [hand-shaking], as the fulfilment and performance of the whole agreement

which was a while ago recited between us without fraud and tricks. This is a complete and lawful match.'" (Grágas i. 316)

It is necessary for there to be witnesses at the ceremony:

"A wedding is lawfully made if the lawful man betrothes the woman, and six men at least are present." (Grágas i. 75)

At this stage, the betrothal cannot be lightly broken:

"If a man will not take his betrothed, he shall be summoned home to take her, and a day be fixed.

Thereupon he shall be summoned to the Þing because he flees from his betrothed. The the Þingmen shall make him an outlaw, and he is called *fudflogi* [a "runaway"]." (Earlier Gulathing's Law 51)

"If the father will not give his daughter to the man to whom she has been betrothed, he shall be summoned home and a day be fixed on which he shall have his betrothed. If the betrother will not let him have her, he shall demand the dowry of his betrothed, and summon him to the Þing for robbery; then the Þingmen have to outlaw him." (Earlier Gulathing's Law 51)

If, however, the value of the bride was inflated wrongly (for example, if she were ill or deformed, and this was hidden from the groom), the groom can demand recompense or break the agreement:

"But if these faults [illness or deformities] are found in the woman, the man who knowing it betrothed her [that is, betrothed her to the groom] is liable to lesser outlawry for it, and the wedding may be prevented if the man betrothed wishes it, provided he had before pronounced the words, 'a complete and lawful match'-- but not otherwise. Now if the betrothed man wants to demand the mund he shall summon the guardian, because he has betrothed the woman knowing such faults in her that she would cost less if she were a bondmaid. He shall summon him to lesser outlawry, and summon nine of his neighbors to the Þing. If the witnesses are against him, he is to be outlawed, and the mund cannot be claimed [by the bride's family]. If the witnesses say that the guardian knew not the faults of the woman, he can defend himself, but he cannot claim the mund unless he can

get five dwellers at the farm of the woman as witnesses that she has not these faults; then the mund is to be paid back." (Grágas i. 316)

The woman, too, could break the betrothal, but only with serious consequences:

"If she [the festarkona] wants to break the betrothal within twelve months, and says she has been betrothed against her will, he [the festarmadr] can use his witnesses against her words and get her. If he lacks witnesses, then she and also her father and mother, or their nearest kinsmen if they do not exist, shall assure it is against her will with an oath, and pay the festarmadr as much as was promised. If this takes place after the wedding, she loses her third [a reference to the law stating that the wife receives 1/3 of the husband's property on his death]." (Frostath iii. 22)

The length of the festar could be delayed by the bride's guardian up to one year:

"The man who has charge of the betrothed woman may keep her from the betrothed man for a

twelvemonth." (Earlier Gulathing's Law 51)

However, it is possible for the length of the festar to be much longer in unusual circumstances, which must be agreed upon during the brúd-kaup:

"Then the betrothal was performed at once, and she [Oddny] was to sit betrothed for three winters. And even if Björn, while staying in the same country [Iceland], was prevented from marrying her, she was to wait for him nevertheless during a fourth winter. If he should not come back from Norway in three winters, Thorkel [Oddny's father] was to give her in marriage if he liked. Also Björn was to send men to Iceland to renew the betrothal if he could not come himself." (Björn Hitdælakappi's Saga)

BRÚÐHLAUP (THE WEDDING)

The wedding itself is usually held at the bride's home, and only rarely at the home of the groom.

The bride wears a special white linen dress (*brúðar-líni*) for the ceremony; in the literature the bride was described as *hvit-földud* (white-folded) and *linbundin* (linen-bound, or garbed in linen). There is a long head-dress (called a *fald*)

that is worn like a veil, and precious stones worn as brooches. Thrymskvida describes this wedding garb (bear in mind that the Brísing necklace was worn by Þórr in order to carry off the deception that He was, in fact, Freyja; and not necessarily as a token worn by all brides):

PRIVATE Þá kvað þat Þórr þrúðigr Áss: Then said
Þórr, the mighty God: Mik munno Æsir argan kalla
"The Æsir will call me effeminate ef ek bindask læt
brúðar-líni. if I let myself be tied in bridal linen."

... ... Bundo þeir Þórr þá brúðar-líni They
then tied Þórr in the bridal linen, ok eno mikla meni
Brísinga; and the great Brísing necklace; léto umb
hánom hrynja luka let keys hang from his belt, ok
kvenn-váðir um kné falla, and woman's clothes hang
'round his knees, enn á briósti breiða steina, and
broad stones be on his breast, ok hagliga um hæfuð
typðo. and fastened the cloth on his head with skill.

The Goddess Vár hears the wedding vows themselves, and enforces them, as we learn in Gylfaginning:

"[The] Ninth [Goddess is named] Vár: she listens to people's oaths and private agreements that women

and men make between each other. Thus these contracts are called *várar*. She also punishes those who break them."

In addition to Vár, Þórr seems to have been invoked as a protector, and his hammer Mjöllnir used as a tool of consecration, placed in the lap of the bride. Once again, Thrymskvida provides an example:

PRIVATE Þá kvað þat Þrymr Þursa dróttinn: Then said
Thrym, the chief of the Thurses: Berið inn hamar
brúði at vígja! "Carry in the hammer to consecrate the
bride! Leggit Miollni í meýjar kné! Lay Mjöllnir
in the maiden's lap!. Vígit okr saman Várar hendi!
Wed us together with the hand of Vár!." The

ceremony is performed with at least the bridal party seated for the feast. The groom and his party are seated on one bench, opposite whom are the father of the bride and his guests. Between them, a cross-bench perpendicular to both, is the *bruðbekk*, or "bride-bench" (it is possible that such benches were family heirlooms saved through generations especially for such wedding-feasts):

"The women sat on the cross-bench; Helga the fair sat

next to the bride, and her eyes often glanced at Gunnlaug, and there the saying was proved that 'the eyes do not hide it if a woman loves a man.'"

(Gunnlaug Omstunga's Saga ii)

"The chief Gudmund Riki was present at the wedding-feast of his overseer Thorstein; he sat in the high-seat, Thorir Helgason opposite to him, and the women on the cross-bench; bright lights were burning, and tables were placed in front. The bride sat in the middle of the cross-bench, with Thorlaug [wife of Gudmund] on the one side, and Geirlaug [wife of Thorir Helgason] on the other." (Ljosvetninga Saga 13)

"The famous champion Gunnar of Hlidarendi was to have his wedding, and had invited to the feast many people. He placed his guests as follows. He sat himself in the middle of the bench... Höskuld was in the middle of the other bench, and his sons inside to the left of him... The bride, Hallgerd, sat in the middle of the cross-bench with her daughter Thorgerd on one side, and on the other Thórhalla, daughter of Asgrím

Ellidagrímsson." (Njál's Saga 34)

The ceremony itself is a relatively simple affair, more like a preliminary leading up to the feast. The bride and groom are seated. Vár is invoked and the wedding vows are exchanged under Her watchful eye. While in the above example the actual hammer of Þórr is used to bless the marriage, no such ceremonial hammers have been discovered in the archaeological record. It is much more reasonable to assume that the sign of Þórr's hammer is made to bless the union (much as is done over the food and drinking-horns at sacrificial feasts in order to sanctify them and for which there is written evidence); this is a motion made with the hand resembling an inverted T. No rings are exchanged, but the bride is given a bunch of keys on her belt to symbolize her position as mistress of the new household.

The feast itself is the centerpoint of the celebration, and gifts are often given to the guests:

"Sigmund rode to Orradal, and visited Thorkel, and was well received. He now began his wooing, and asked Thurid in marriage. Thorkel took this well, and

thought it a great honor for his daughter and them all. Sigmund made his wedding-feast at Hladir with Hakon jarl, and the jarl made it last for seven nights." (Færeyinga Saga 26)

"Heidrek married Herborg, the daughter of King Hrollaug in Gardariki. Their wedding-feast was made, and no man had heard of a greater feast in these lands; it lasted a month; when it ended the chiefs were led away with gifts." (Hervara Saga 14)

"Olaf had made preparations, with the best of all kinds of drink and provisions that could be got. He had invited many high-born men from the districts. When Rögnvald jarl arrived with his men, the king received him well, and large, good, and well-furnished rooms were given to him; the servants took care that there should be lack of nothing which might be proper for a feast. When the feast had lasted some days, the king and the jarl and the king's daughter spoke together; it was agreed that Rögnvald of Western Gautland should betroth Astrid the daughter of Olaf, King of Sweden, to Olaf, King of Norway... Then the

feast was made larger, and the wedding of Olaf and Astrid was celebrated with great splendor." (St. Olaf's Saga 94)

Even a family of modest means was expected to extend hospitality to the wedding party:

"A bondi [farmer] shall feed at least five of them [the groomsmen and bridesmaids]. He is an outlaw if he refuses to lodge them. This is if the bride or bridegroom is with them; otherwise he must feed three men." (Kristinrett Thorláks og Ketils biskupa p. 94)

While the bride is seated on the bruðbekk, the husband presents her with the *linfé*, or linen-fee, which is agreed upon as part of the negotiations leading up to the betrothal:

"Then he [the bridegroom] shall sit between the groomsmen and she between the bridesmaids. He shall walk across the floor and give her *linfé*. That is lawful whether the gift is small or great." (King Magnus' Laws)

During the wedding feast, it is customary to present *bekkjar-gjöf*, or bench-gifts, to the bride:

"At this moment [as Kjartan Olafsson was leaving for

Iceland] Ingibjörg opened a mead-cask standing at her side, and took out of it a white and gold woven woman's head-gear, which she gave to Kjartan, saying it would be only too good for Gudrún Ósvifr's daughter to wrap around her head; 'and thou wilt give it to her as a bench-gift. I want the Icelandic woman to see that she who has been talking with thee in Norway is not of thrall-kin. It was in a bag of *gudvef* and was most costly." (Laxdæla Saga 43)

More information on feasts in general may be found
HYPERLINK "http://209.201.10.140/religion/veitsla.html" [here](http://209.201.10.140/religion/veitsla.html).

HJÓN (HUSBAND AND WIFE)

After the wedding, the bride and groom were considered *hjón*; husband and wife. The bride was also considered *eiginkona* (which means "own woman") as well as *húsfreyja* ("lady of the house" or "housewife"). Even though the husband, in his role as guardian of the wife, managed the family's property, the distinction of who owned what was still keenly noted. That way, in case of divorce or other events that necessitated the division of

their property (such as inheritance) the property of the wife could be distinguished from that of the husband. The husband's role as guardian of his wife was even legally enforced:

"Every man has claim on behalf of his wife. A *hauld* [married woman] owns three marks if she is struck, but a widow shall have the same *rétt* [right to seek redress] as her last husband, and the one she wishes shall prosecute. But if a maiden is struck, her nearest kinsman shall claim her *rétt* as if it were his own. But if she is to have it herself, the right plaintiff shall summon a *Ping*.")

-CHAPTER TWELVE-

GODS AND WIGHTS

ÓÐINN (ODIN)

Óðinn is the chief of the Æsir, and is known by a huge variety of names. These various names reflect the incredibly complex nature of this being, who both inspires poets and wars, who gave life to men but who also deals unfair defeat to warriors so they can join him in Valhalla. It was He who mastered both the magical arts of the runes and seiðr, and who constantly wanders the worlds seeking wisdom and knowledge. His eight-legged steed, Sleipnir, bears Him from world to world, and his two ravens Hugin and Munin, bring him tidings from the far places they travel. At the battle of Ragnarökr, He will be slain by the wolf, Fenrir, who will in turn be slain by Óðinn's son.

ÞÓRR (THOR)

Mighty Þórr, son of Óðinn, is the greatest single warrior amongst the Æsir. Wielding His mighty hammer mjölnir which automatically returns to His hand once cast, He is often away on expeditions into Jötunheim (giant-home) to slay those who are destined to be the enemies of the Æsir at the final battle,

Ragnarökr. He is said to travel by chariot drawn by two goats, whom Red-Beard (one of Þórr's by-names) is able to kill for food and then bring back to life the following morning. He will meet His end at Ragnarökr, slain by the Midgard Serpent's venoms, after slaying the fell wyrm in turn.

LOKI

Loki is the son of Laufey, and many of the cosmologically early myths present him as being in the company of the Æsir. However, as the chronology of the myths progresses, his outward nature changes from that of a clever rogue to that of a true enemy of the Æsir.

It is fashionable within some circles of the broader Heathen community to treat Loki as a mere "trickster"; a misunderstood jester whose harmless pranks only serve to stir up the complacent. As such he is considered to be a figure worthy of honor in Heathen religious ceremony as the instigator of growth through change. However, a careful study of the Lore concerning this being yields a different story; he is an enemy of the Æsir, an agent of the Jötunar, and ultimately a foe of mankind. Neither was he the object of worship historically, as far as can be determined. For these reasons he is quite

undeserving of worship or reverence in a Heiðni context.

One misconception concerning Loki that has persisted is his association with fire. The roots of this misconception are clear enough; the ON word *logi* ("fire") is similar enough to the name Loki for confusion to take root. The two are, however, completely unconnected etymologically. This mistaken connection was furthered when Richard Wagner made the connection between fire and his character Loge in his epic Ring cycle of operas. One clear argument against such a connection is to be found in Gylfaginning, where, in the hall of Utgard-Loki, Loki loses an eating contest with the giant Logi—the personification of fire. If Loki were indeed a fire-god, such an adversarial position would make no sense.

If anything, Loki is more properly connected with the air. An alternate name for Loki is Loptr (used in several different places, including Lokasenna and Hyndluljóð), which is cognate with the ON term *lopt* ("air"). He also has a fondness for taking on the form of a bird, as in Haustlöng. However, as with most of the Æsir, it is a mistake to claim that Loki is a "god of air"; such simplifications are suitable for other beings (Þursar, for example), but not for the multi-faceted and complex

inhabitants of Asgard and their kith.

It is often argued by the pro-Lokians that Loki is seen throughout the mythology as a friend to the Æsir; he is the foster-brother of [HYPERLINK \l "Odin"Oðinn](#) (the two were good friends and often drank together), and is depicted as helping to solve many dilemmas through his quick wit and guile. While this is true on a surface level, this view fails to mention that he was in fact responsible for most of those dilemmas in the first place, and it does not speak to the present relationship of Loki with the Æsir (after his instrumental role in the death of Baldr was revealed) in a cosmological sense. Loki's relationship with the Æsir worsens with time, going from friendship and active help, to causing strife and finding a solution to the problem he created himself, to causing strife and offering no solution; ultimately culminating in his participation in the murder of Baldr and (in the future) taking up arms against the Æsir at Ragnarök. So thorough is Loki's undermining of the Æsir that it is not difficult to come to the conclusion that he was a plant from the beginning, and all his actions were directed at the undermining of the Æsir (although in fairness this is never explicitly stated, and is purely

supposition).

Þrymskviðða tells us of one instance in which Loki seems to be a friend of the Æsir. When ["Thor" Þórr's](#) hammer is stolen, it is Loki that discovers its whereabouts and helps in the scheme to recover it (by disguising Þórr in bridal linen and pretending he is Freyja). Remarkably, the idea for the scheme (which incidentally humiliates Þórr) doesn't come from Loki, but from Heimdall; it is Loki, however, who finally convinces Þórr to go through with it, and who accompanies Þórr on the journey to recover his hammer, disguised as a bridesmaid. However, is it truly an act of friendship? Þórr could have recovered Mjöllnir through more direct means; the subterfuge seems almost unnecessary. But true to his nature, Loki cannot resist an opportunity to see the mightiest warrior of the Æsir opening himself up to charges of *ergi*, or unmanliness (not to mention being humbled and humiliated), first-hand.

In Gylfaginning, Snorri tells us that Loki was not only responsible for the Æsir making a poor bargain with the giant builder in return for Asgard's walls being built, but in typical fashion that he also rescues them from the predicament of his

invention. This seems to usher in the first instance where Loki's wiles are needed to undo a crisis of his own making. It also seems to describe the last instance where Loki does outright good for the Æsir, by siring Oðinn's steed Sleipnir in the process (although even then it seems to be an incidental and unintentional side-effect of a plan only undertaken under threat of death at the hands of the Æsir). It should also be pointed out that Loki's intervention was entirely unneeded; when Þórr returns and learns of the situation, he summarily slays the Jötunn-builder, rendering the problem moot, but introducing the new problem that solemn oaths sworn by the Æsir had been violated, their collective *wyrd* is stained. Once more, one of Loki's schemes has led to the diminishment of the Æsir.

In *Haustlöng*, we are told that it is Loki who delivers the goddess Idunn to the giant Þjazi (in order to save himself from Þjazi's wrath), thus threatening the immortality enjoyed by the Æsir by virtue of the apples she provides. It is true that he later rescues her with the help of Freja's falcon-shape, but she would never have needed rescuing had Loki not been willing to sacrifice an innocent—someone who was a friend and ally—

in order to save his own skin. (By contrast, Oðinn may not be the most trustworthy among the Æsir, but his motives are not selfish, but for the greater good.)

It is in the accounts of the murder of Baldr that Loki's evil seed finally comes to fullest flower. Discovering through deception the one thing that was able to bring harm to Baldr was mistletoe, Loki connived for the blind Höðr to cast a dart of mistletoe at Baldr, killing him. But that was not enough for the vicious Loki; it was agreed that if all living things wept for Baldr, he would be allowed to return to the lands of the living. Loki, disguised as the Jötunn Thokk, refused to do so, and Baldr was confined to the realm of the dead until after Ragnarök. So Loki is twice responsible for the absence of Baldr the Beautiful from Asgard; the first time as the instigator of his murder, and the second time as the stumbling-block preventing his return. It should of course be pointed out that there is no Loki-figure in the version of Balder's death handed down to us by Saxo Grammaticus. This, however, is merely indicative of the fact that various versions of the tale exist, and is no argument against his evil nature. Where he does play a part, it is a fell part indeed.

It is not until the events recorded in Lokasenna, however, that the true extent of Loki's perfidy in the matter of Baldr's murder is uncovered. In this, the last interaction of Loki with the Æsir, his recitation of the failings of many among the Æsir is informative, but hardly news. What is a revelation is his admission of guilt in the affair of Baldr's murder; he flat-out brags that he is the reason that Baldr is among the Æsir no more.

There are several reasons that Heiðinjar would question the appropriateness of Loki-worship. Cosmologically, it makes little sense to do so, as we know Loki is bound and thus lacks the freedom to act in Midgard; even if he hears such entreaties, there is naught he can do to act on them. Historically, there is no evidence—certainly no literary evidence, and not even incidental evidence such as place-names or artifacts—that Loki was ever a figure of worship among the Norse, and thus to do so would violate the historical reconstructionist principals upon which Heiðni is based.

Our position in relation to the timeline of the mythology must be remembered. Cosmologically, we are now living between lines 109 and 110 of Völuspá; Baldr the Beautiful is dead and

residing in Hel, Loki's involvement in that sad affair has been discovered, and he has been bound beneath the Earth with his own son's guts. We await with trepidation the beginning of the events described later in Völuspá that will lead up to the final apocalyptic battle of Ragnarök and the rebirth of the world.

(By contrast, while Baldr may be dead, he is never said to be bound, merely dwelling in Hel's high hall in a place of honor, and we know that communications to and from Hel are not uncommon.)

And what role will Loki play in this final battle? We are told that he will be the steersman of Naglfar, the "ship-of-nails" that transports the hosts of monsters to fight the Æsir in the final climactic battle of Ragnarök. He will march in the ranks led by his son Fenris-wolf, who attacks from the west as Surt attacks from the south and Hrym from the east. In the course of this ultimate battle, Loki and Heimdall will slay one another, and thus will his sorrowful wyrd be fulfilled. Thus Loki's ultimate treachery against the Æsir is wrought thricefold; not only will his offspring Fenrir slay Odin (who, since Odin and Loki are foster-brothers, is in reality the slaying of his own uncle), and his other offspring the Midgard Serpent slay Thor, but Loki

himself will take up arms against the Æsir and make it possible for their foes to strike at them (by steering the ship that brings them to battle).

Such a figure, who has wreaked so much havoc upon the Æsir and is doomed to do so much more against their cause, is not one to be revered by those who call themselves friends and worshippers of the Æsir. To lift a horn to him at sumbel or celebrate a blót in his honor is to honor a deadly foe of Æsir, who are truly the friends of men.

There are some who believe that to ascribe an evil and anti-Æsir nature to Loki is merely an attempt to turn him into a sort of "Norse Satan", in some sort of attempt to "Christianize" Heiðni. This is far from the case, and in any event, the essential nature of Loki is so far removed from that of the Christian Satan (which in turn is far different from that of the Hebrew Satan, but that is a discussion for a different place) that such an equation would require an enormous leap, which Heiðinjar are disinclined to take.

Christianity sees their Satan as the source of all that is evil (by their definition, anything which opposes the will of Yahweh of Sinai is by definition evil); evil is thus a sort of epidemic

which spreads from that single central source. The Norse conception is decidedly more pluralistic, and Loki is but a single enemy that the Æsir must face during the history of the universe. It is not that Loki is singled out for derision and lack of worship, but merely that he is no more worthy of worship than Thjazi or Surtr, his previous seeming friendship with the Æsir notwithstanding.

Too, it should be pointed out that, while both the figures of Satan and Loki are said to be imprisoned in some way-- Satan in Hell, Loki bound beneath the Earth-- Satan's ability to work his will upon the minds of men and the face of the Earth is manifest, while Loki is limited to the inadvertent causing of earthquakes when the venom from the serpent hits his face, when his wife Sigyn must perforce empty the bowl she holds to shield him, on occasion. Christians must, according to their mythology, deal with Satan and his temptations on a daily basis. In general, Heiðinjar do not think much of Loki, because he is largely irrelevant in the world. Unfortunately, he will regain his relevance at Ragnarök.

- CHAPTER FIFTEEN -

THE POETIC EDDA

(Also known as Sæmundar's Edda or the Elder Edda)

Introduction by Peter H. Salus

PRIVATE "TYPE=PICT;ALT=The Codex Regius; one of the few manuscript copies of the Poetic Edda"

The Old Icelandic Poetic Tradition

Icelandic traditional poetry finds its origin in oral composition long before the art of writing was known or used in Scandinavia to record poetic texts. The poetry is traditional in the sense that it was transmitted by oral performance, and survived for centuries, passed from generation to generation, by oral transmission. There is no question of authorship, for the poet (*fornskáld*) was a performer rather than an originator. He recounted familiar material and his performance of a particular story differed from other performances in metrical and lexical interpretation. Two versions of the story of Atli's death (Attila the Hun) appear in the heroic poems of the Edda, one told economically, the other with an abundance of detail. Not until poetry was recorded in manuscript, most likely

during the thirteenth century, was there a sense of a unique copy or of an 'authentic' version.

On the other hand, alongside eddaic, or traditional poetry, there existed a poetic tradition formal in character and individual in composition. This tradition is known as skaldic poetry, after the Icelandic word for poet - skáld. While the meter and diction of eddaic poetry are relatively simple, skaldic verse is composed in a variety of complex forms and employs a larger number of involved metaphors, or Kenningar.

Old Icelandic traditional poetry appears to have derived from the same common Germanic stock as Old High German, Old English, and Old Saxon poetry. It shares the same verse line, known generally as the long alliterative line. It

shares, apparently, the same lexical inventory, the same stereotyped diction. For example, the formula *fírar í fólki* 'warriors among the folk', which appears in 'The Treachery of Asmund', occurs in the Old High German *Hildebrandslied* (*fírco in folche*) and in the Old English riddles (*fīnum on folce*), although the forms in which these poems appear suggest that their dates of composition span half a millennium.

The similarity of meter and repetition of diction throughout the

Germanic poetic traditions are evidences of the striking stability of traditional poetry, even before writing 'fixed' such forms.

The materials of the Germanic traditions are also comparable. The heroes of Icelandic heroic legends participate in the same events and belong to the same historical milieu as the heroes of Old High German and Old English heroic poetry. Old Icelandic poetry is unique, however, in the manner in which it treats traditional Germanic gods. There are only scant references and allusions to the Germanic pagan pantheon in Old English Chronicles and genealogies. Possibly the early arrival of Christianity in England first with the converted Romans during the last years of the Empire's occupation, and then with the Celtic monasteries, and finally with the proselytizing Roman Catholic Church during the sixth century A.D. seems to have inhibited the continuation of whatever poetic tradition might have existed about the older gods. Both Old English and Old High German traditional poetry successfully adapted their techniques to the incorporation of Christian materials, while the Old Icelandic tradition seems never to have been able to incorporate the new materials, except in a few isolated later

literary imitations of the traditional form. The reason for this difference in development lies undoubtedly with the late arrival of Christianity in Scandinavia (A.D. 1000), and the paucity of foreign clergy in Iceland before the fourteenth century. Traditional myths appear to have been very popular in Iceland for three centuries after the conversion, while comparable poetry was being forcibly suppressed on the Continent and in the British Isles. Further, poetry as entertainment was obviously tolerated and encouraged in Iceland at a time when arts in Christian Europe were directed toward revelation of Scripture and declaration of Church doctrine. Of course, the lack of a substantial number of foreign clergy in Iceland prevented the literate decay - or corruption - of the Icelandic language that would have resulted from competition with the more acceptable language of Christian culture - Latin. The vernacular remained a rich means of literary expression and developed to a greater extent than elsewhere in Europe, with the possible exception of England under the enlightened King Alfred. Into Icelandic were translated French romances and Latin Chronicles. The thirteenth-century Icelander could read in his own language the

romances of *Le Chevalier au Lion*, the legends of Merlin and Arthur, and the history of Charlemagne.

Icelandic traditional poetry differs from the other Germanic traditions in several other respects as well. First, the poetry falls syntactically into stanzas, or strophes, while the rest of Germanic traditional verse, with very few exceptions, is stichic; that is, without strophic division and with a considerable amount of enjambment, which is absent in the Icelandic. Second, eddaic poetry uses dialogue to a larger extent than either Old English or Old High German poetry. There is, proportionally, little poetic narrative in the Old Icelandic corpus. However, in place of narrative description there are frequently prose narrative links at the head or the foot of poems and even interpolated between strophes. These suggest either degeneration of older poetic narrative passages or a late editor's attempt to make clear a dramatic situation obscured by the economy of the verse. One must remember, however, that the intended audience of the poetry was familiar with the poet's material. No traditional performer would dream of trying to be 'original' in selecting material. His audience expected the old 'true' stories, and not 'made-up' ones, but

awaited the skald's personal inventions in dialogue. The mythological allusions which to the modern reader seem obscure and remote, must have been suggestive to the audience and readers of the thirteenth century. So the poetic performance could afford to be economical. It suggested rather than described the details of incidents.

Performance of traditional poems did not depend on dramatic suspense, since the audience was expected to know the outcome of the story anyway. The poet could, however, play on his audience's anticipation of the manner in which the inevitable was to come about. So, for example, in the heroic poems three different versions of the manner of Sigurd's death are offered in three separate poems. The fact of Sigurd's death could not be altered, but one could vary the details of how death comes.

Traditional Icelandic poetry also contains a good deal of what may be called 'courtesy-book' materials; that is, instruction relating to domestic and heroic rituals of everyday life. The same sort of materials appear in the Old English poetic *Maxims*, and in the Finnish *Kalevala*. Such an interest is evidence of how close these poetic traditions were to the

priestly tradition of moral instruction from which these aphoristic guides to a good life probably derive.

Prosody

A reader brought up on English poetry since Chaucer - or, for that matter, on Greek and Latin poetry - may at first have some difficulty in 'hearing' Icelandic verse, for he will find nothing he can recognize as a metrical foot, that is to say, a syllabic unit containing a fixed number of syllables with a fixed structure of either (as in English) stressed and unstressed syllables or (as in Greek and Latin) long and short syllables.

In English verse, lines are metrically equivalent only if they contain both the same kind of feet, and the same number of syllables. But in Icelandic verse, as in Anglo-Saxon, all lines are metrically equivalent which contain the same number of stressed syllables: the unstressed syllables preceding or succeeding these may vary between none and three (occasionally more).

The principal meters in Icelandic poetry are two: Epic Meter (fornyrðislag: 'old verse') and Chant Meter (ljóðaháttur).

Epic Meter

This is essentially the same as the meter of Beowulf. Each line

contains four stresses and is divided by a strongly marked caesura into two half-lines with two stresses each. (In printing Icelandic verse, the convention has been to leave a gap between the two half-lines: in our translations we have printed the whole line as it is normally printed in an English poem.)

The two half-lines are linked by alliteration. The first stressed syllable of the second half-line must alliterate with either or both of the stressed syllables in the first: its second stressed syllable must not alliterate.

All vowels are considered to alliterate with each other. In the case of syllables beginning with s, sc (sk) can only alliterate with sc, sh with sh, and st with st etc.: similarly, voiced and unvoiced th can only alliterate with themselves.

In Icelandic poetry, unlike Anglo-Saxon, the lines are nearly always end-stopped without enjambment, and are grouped into strophes varying in length from two to six or seven lines, the commonest strophe having four.

Depárt! You shall not páss through

My táll gátes of tówennng stóne:

It befíts a wife to wínd yárn,

Nót to knów anóther's húsband.

Chant Meter

The unit is a couplet, the first of which is identical with the standard line of Epic Meter: the second contains three stresses instead of four (some hold that it only contains two), two of which must be linked by alliteration.

If you kn6w a fáithful friend you can trúst,

Gó óften to his hóuse:

Gráss and brámbles gráw quickly Upón an untródden tráck.

Speech Meter and Incantation Meter

Though these are officially classified as separate meters, they are better thought of as variations on Epic Meter and Chant Meter respectively. There is no case of a poem written entirely in either, nor even of a long sustained passage within a poem.

In Speech Meter (málahátr), each half-line contains an extra stress, making six in all.

Líttle it ís to dený, lóng it ís to trável

In Incantation Meter (kviðuhátr), two couplets of Chant Meter are followed by a fifth line of three stresses, which is a verbal variation on the fourth line.

I know a tenth: if troublesome ghosts Ride the rafters aloft,

I can work it so they wander astray,

Unable to find their forms, Unable to find their homes.

Quantity

In Icelandic verse, vowel length plays a role, though by no means as important a one as in Greek and Latin. For example, if a line ends in a single stressed syllable (a masculine ending), this may be either short or long: but if it ends in a disyllable, the first of which is stressed (a feminine ending), the stressed syllable must be short. For example, Ever would be permissible: Evil would not.

Icelandic, like Greek and Latin, is an inflected language: modern English has lost nearly all its inflections. This means that, in modern English, vowels which are short in themselves are always becoming long by position, since, more often than not, they will be followed by more than one consonant. For example, in the line

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
there is, if it is scanned quantitatively, Only one short syllable,
dis.

Quantitative verse, as Robert Bridges has demonstrated, can be written in English, but Only as a virtuoso feat. In our translations, therefore, we have ignored quantity. Also now and

again, though actually very seldom, we have ignored the strong caesura between the two half-lines, when it seemed more natural to do so.

The Kenning

The kennings so common in Icelandic poetry are, like the epithets in Homer, metrical formulae but, unlike the latter, their meaning is not self-evident. Diomedes of the loud war-cry is a straightforward description, but no reader can guess that Grani's Road means the river Rhine, unless he already knows the Volsung legend in which Grani is the name of Sigurd's horse. The kenning may be exemplified by such usages as 'Meiti's plain' for the sea or 'Meiti's slopes' for the waves: Meiti was one of the sea-gods and thus stands in the same relationship to the sea as other gods stand to the land or the mountains. Other kennings are based on allusion to a mythological event: Odin was once hanged himself - see the 'Words of the High One' - he is therefore the 'gallow's load'; the Nibelung's treasure was submerged in the Rhine and all gold glitters, therefore gold can be called 'Rhine fire, or 'Rhine gravel'. In later verse the kennings become most complicated. For example, falconry caused 'hawk's land' to become a

kenning for 'arm'. The wearing of arm-rings of gold caused 'gold' to be called 'arm-fire'. These were then combined so that 'hawk's land's flame' means 'gold', etc.

The Riddles and Charms

Poetic composition of riddles was principally an exercise of scholastic wit throughout the Middle Ages. Hundreds of Latin riddles in poetic form have survived. In general they are puzzles in which some object or phenomenon is described the reader or listener is expected to 'solve' the puzzle and state the object. Riddle-making was equally popular in the vernacular. In Old English, for example, almost a hundred survive.

The lack of a Latin-educated clergy in Iceland accounts for the non-existence of such a tradition there, but a similar type of riddle does appear in Old Icelandic poetry. In the *Heidrek's* saga, Odin disguises himself as Gestumblindi and challenges the king to guess his riddles, all of which are elaborate metaphors for common things. Since Odin knows the answers himself, the whole affair is a sport, a rather elaborate parlor game. But, when Gestumblindi tires of the sport he asks a question of Heidrek, the answer to which no one can know except Odin: 'What said Odin in the ear of Baldur before he

was carried to the fire?' The same question ends his battle of wits with Vafthruthnir, and the loser of such a challenge has usually wagered his head. A sort of riddle occurs in the Halfs saga poem 'The Treachery of Asmund' in the dreams of Innstein. Half fails to guess the true portent of the dreams (or, more likely, is too bold to be prudent even though he suspects ill of his host), and is subsequently killed. The riddles of Gestumblindi and the dreams of Innstein are puzzles demanding a correct interpretation. They appeal to a process of thought rather than to an inventory of knowledge.

The riddles in the mythological poems of the Edda are of a different character and appear to serve a different function. The questions Thor poses of Alvis, and Alvis' subsequent replies, make up a textbook of poetic diction for common things in each world. The purpose of the inquisition, outside of the immediate dramatic situation in which Thor guards a goddess by keeping a dwarf at bay, is mnemonic. The poetic structure preserves, and makes memorable, poetic synonyms for important vocabulary items. Such emphasis on the *mot juste* for a thing, according to the speaker is an example of Germanic name-magic, associated with the primitive belief

that knowledge of the proper name for a thing gives the knower the ability to evoke the object, or its power. There is a saga incident in which several Icelanders, floundering in a small boat at sea, want to pray for deliverance from their peril, but they have to seek someone who knows the name of God. Once he is found, they are saved.

'The Lay of Vafthrudnir' is also mnemonic, but an exposition of myth rather than a lexicon. The riddles, or questions, in the poem, however, are pertinent to the dramatic situation as well. Challenging an opponent with riddles is a means whereby Odin can coerce giants and the dead to reveal more of their wisdom than they would wish to, especially if they knew who their inquisitor was. Odin must disguise himself so that the challenge will be accepted. Odin searches for knowledge of the fate of the gods, so his questioning leads toward revelation of the future, though it begins with asking for exposition of the past. Proper questioning that is, ritual questioning functions like a charm. It compels response unless the questioned person does not know the answer, in which case the inquisition ends. This is, in a sense, Odin's security, for he can end the challenge at any point by asking the unanswerable question.

Riddles also suggest the Nordic fascination with the apparent relationship between the structure of language and the structure of the cosmos. For the Scandinavians the wisest man he who knows most of the structure of the cosmos is also the most skilful poet. It is, hence, appropriate that the god who is compelled to search out the facts of the cosmogonic scheme is the god of poetry. Before Odin, the giants possessed the mead of poetry, and the giants still have knowledge unknown to the gods. They can, for example, remember a time when the gods did not yet exist, and they must, therefore, have been present at the birth of language. Knowing the name of something and knowing the events of the past imply some control over the future. There is in the Nordic mind a subtle relationship, and a necessary one, between an event and the language with which it is described or anticipated. Questions and answers, then, seek to put into a harmonious relationship man's thought and the facts of the world about him which he cannot fully comprehend or control.

Charms, as T. S. Eliot so nicely puts it in *The Music of Poetry*, 'are very practical formulae designed to produce definite results, such as getting a cow out of a bog'. Charms derive

from priestly incantations which solicited gods and forces of nature to fulfil their roles in turning the wheel of seasons. By the time priestly incantation transformed into poetry, and poetry found a means of being recorded in manuscript, charms had developed into ritual accompaniment for the warrior on the battlefield as well as domestic tool in the home. Charms render weapons more efficient and a hero's courage more resolute. Charms are the healer's accompaniment in the fabrication and application of remedies for wounds and disease.

The Old Icelandic word for charm is *galdr*, associated with the verb *gala* 'to sing, to chant'. They are extant in Old High German (*galtar*) and Old English (*galdor*), but references to charms are more plentiful in the literature of Iceland and Finland, where magic continued to influence domestic life and thought for centuries after the arrival of the Christian Church. Charms in Ireland and Wales seem to have degenerated into curses and insults after the arrival of Christianity and there are comparable curses and insults in the flyting episodes of Old Icelandic heroic poetry, where exchange of words between antagonists before a battle seems to have lost its character of evoking divine assistance in favour of heaping imprecations.

Charms exist intact in Icelandic only in runes - the preChristian Germanic form of writing. Runes ('mysteries, secrets') are magic signs whose individual shape, or stafr (English stave), represents an incantation - that is, a charm itself. Runes are not a practical form of writing, but priestly inscription for divination or sortilege. Odin learns effective charms in the form of runes in 'The Words of the High One', and each rune (there are normally sixteen runes in the Scandinavian runic 'alphabet') is associated intrinsically with a particular charm. Odin's first charm, for example, is a 'Help' charm, and Help-charms may be associated with the N-rune, which represents the word Nauðr 'Need'. If one scratched this rune (n) on a fingernail, it should evoke aid for a particular distress. N-rune charms seem to have been used especially for delayed childbirth.

For Odin, it appears, achieving knowledge of charms consists merely in learning runes, rather than in learning the incantations associated with each rune. Incantations are still extant in Old English and Old High German but they no longer exist in Old Icelandic poetry. Runic inscriptions, however, survive in great numbers in Scandinavia, usually as

inscriptions on stone grave-markers (there are over two thousand in Sweden alone). These are evidence of a traditional association between runic charms and an intent to protect the dead. The Christian Church officially disapproved of the use of runes because of their suggestion of pagan religious practices. Runes were outlawed for some time in Iceland and their practitioners were punished as witches. Some grave-markers have both roman and runic letters, as if the inscriber was assuring success by appealing to both pagan and Christian powers.

The function of runic charms in Old Icelandic poetry varies. Some charms, probably older than the others in Origin, directly solicit forces of nature. Charms for delayed birth, for example, demand nature to fulfil itself. Odin's ninth charm calms waves and winds so that seamen may return safely to shore. His second charm, for healers, seeks to improve the body's resistance to infection and pain. These may be classified as domestic charms, and their lineal descendants seem to be popular medicinal recipes.

Odin also knows charms for the battlefield, such as those which protect against the weapons of others. Odin's third

charm blunts his enemies' weapons, and his fourth gives him power to escape fetters. His seventh protects his companions from the fires of opponents (burning others within a hall or house was considered the worst of heroic behavior, and is the cruel culmination of the feuds involving the family of Njal in Njals saga. Asmund fires the hall in which his guests sleep in 'The Treachery of Asmund'). Such charms are often anti-charms, for swords, if made of iron, were already considered charmed.

Besides these beneficial charms, Odin knows another kind of magic, seid 'sorcery, magic', which is used to bring misfortune upon another. His tenth charm, which keeps spirits from their proper resting place, is an example. His sixteenth charm, a form of love-magic to deceive a desirable girl, is undoubtedly a form of seid as well.

Evocation of the dead involves still another kind of magic, known as ergi, 'unnaturalness, filth'. This power can be used to transform oneself (and Odin is a notorious shape-changer) or to bring about unnatural behavior in another, such as cowardice or homosexuality. Odin's twelfth charm, revivng the dead which hang from the gallows, seems to be ergi (a filth-rune).

Skirnir, in 'Skirnir's Ride', threatens Gerd with ergi if she will not submit herself to Frey. Though other threats have failed, this one frightens her into submission, for she knows that ergi can transform her so that she will ever be loathsome to men, or so that her lust for men will be unnatural.

The Nordic Pantheon

Snorri Sturlason, Icelandic poet and historian at the turn of the twelfth century, offers an euhemeristic explanation for the origin of the northern gods in his Ynglingasaga: 'Far to the east of the river Don in Asia was a land called Asaland or Asaheim, whose chief city was called Asgard. In that city was a chief called Odin. It was a great center for sacrifice. Twelve priests of the temple, as the custom went, directed the sacrifices and judged between men. They were called gods (díar an Irish loan-word) or lords (drótnar); everyone paid them service and veneration'. Snorri goes on to say that Odin was so wise in counsel and so skilful in magic that people began to call his name in times of trouble, and after his death they worshipped him as a god. In his Gylfaginning, an exposition of traditional Icelandic myths, Snorri states that there are twelve divine gods, and then goes on to list thirteen: Odin, Thor, Baldur, Njörd,

Frey, Tyr, Bragi, Heimdal, Höd (or Hödur), Vidar, Váli, Ull, and Forseti. Odin had two brothers, Vili and Vé, who qualify as gods, and there is also Aegir, god of the sea. There are many goddesses, but the only ones who play important roles in surviving myths are Freya, daughter of Njörd and sister of Frey; Frigg, Odin's wife whose name and function suggest that she was originally the same goddess as Freya; and Idun, Bragi's wife and guardian of the magic apples which restore youth to the gods. Snorri adds that many also count Loki among the gods, for he is friend and companion of Thor and foster brother to Odin, though both of his parents were giants. Both Odin and Thor had at least one giant parent as well. Loki is distinguished from the rest of the gods historically by not having any cult or place-names in Scandinavia attributable to him - and for good reason. He is a malicious shape and sex changer who had not only begotten monsters such as Fenris-wolf and the Midgard Serpent, but had borne Odin's eight-footed horse Sleipnir. It is Loki, according to most versions of the myth, who instigated the murder of Baldur by persuading Baldur's blind brother Höd to cast a mistletoe dart at him. For this deed the other gods caught Loki, bound him to a rock and

caused venom to drip on his face. There he is to stay until Ragnarök, or destruction-of-the-gods. There is an apparent analogy here to the myth of Prometheus, even to the extent that Loki's name suggests 'fire' (logi). 'The Song of the Sybil' and 'Loki's Flyting' allude to these events.

Odin is the foremost of the gods. He is known by many names, among which are All-Father, High One, Father of the Slain, and the Hooded One. The latter appellation refers to his many disguises in his journeys throughout the worlds to learn of the fates of the gods. He is the god of poetry, and god of the dead. Odin achieved wisdom for the gods by acquiring the lore of runes during a ritual self-sacrifice, hanging for nine days and nights. From the giants he stole the mead of poetry. Both of these events are alluded to in 'The Words of the High One'. Because of his self-sacrifice, Odin is known also as the god of the hanged, or of the gallows. His twelfth runic charm has the power, for example, to revive the dead on the gallows so that he may speak with them. He is the god of the battle-dead as well, and hence is master of the Valkyries (Choosers of the Slain) who bring to Valhalla heroes Odin has designated to die on the battlefield. 'The Lay of Erik' describes the preparation of

Valhalla in anticipation of the arrival of Erik Blood-Axe and the other chieftains killed with him at the battle of Stainmore in 954. Odin can also summon the dead from their graves and compel them to utter their wisdom. The Sybil in 'Baldur's Dreams' is such an example, forced by charms to arise from her grave. Odin is also *galdrsfaðir* 'Father-of-Charms', and his powers include *seid*, or black magic, which brings misfortune to its object. Odin is deceptive and an oath-breaker it is said that his breaking of oaths sworn to the giants brings about the wars leading to the gods' final destruction. Therefore, Odin was popular among certain viking chieftains whose truces and solemn oaths were never meant to be held. Appropriately Odin is frequently associated with beasts of battle - the raven and the wolf.

Thor is the mightiest of the gods and the only god about whom no evil can be said. He is the only one of the gods able to withstand and repel Loki. Loki's only taunt against Thor is to remind him of an incident during Thor's journey to the east when he was deceived by a giant of prodigious magical powers. The taunt is hollow, however, for Thor had acquitted himself so well during that trip that the race of giants feared for

their lives. Thor is the protector of the gods against all their enemies, specifically dwarves, elves, giants, trolls, and the Midgard-Serpent. At Ragnarök he battles the Midgard-Serpent to the death. He is killer of the giants Geirrod, Hungnir, Thrym, and Hymir; and, in an ironic inversion of roles, he defeats the dwarf Alvis in a battle of wits.

Njörd and Frey are not properly Aesir (divine gods) at all, but Vanir, who had come to Asgard as hostages after a war between the Aesir and the Vanir over the question of which of the two races should demand worship. The Aesir rendered as hostages in return Mimir and Haenir. Njörd is the male counterpart of the Germanic goddess Nerthus, mentioned by Tacitus as the object of fertility rites on an island in the north. His role in the Nordic pantheon is not entirely distinct from that of his son Frey, whom, it is said, was begotten by Njörd on his own sister. Frey is one of the three principal gods of the pantheon (with Odin and Thor) in the religious cults of Scandinavia as well as in the poetry, for all of the mythological poems we possess feature one of these three gods. Frey is a fertility god. His idol at Uppsala was described as having a huge phallus. He seems to have been especially popular in

certain valleys and plains of Iceland which were thought to be particularly propitious. The single myth about him that survives in the traditional poetry 'Skirnir's Ride', may easily be interpreted as an allegory of the impregnation of the earth with fertile grain. He is associated with the bear, and his name is apparently the source of the Old English appellation for Lord (Christ and God), Frea.

One other god deserves special notice. He is Baldur, the slain god, known as the purest of the gods. His death is the first catastrophe in a series of events which resolve in the destruction of the gods. Baldur, however, we are told in 'The Song of Sybil', will rise again. His death and resurrection are inevitably associated with the death and resurrection of Christ, but there is no real reason to assume direct borrowing from Christianity in the myth, for Baldur, like Adonis, is a typical sacrificial god whose myth grows out of an artful mimicry of the cyclical regeneration of the earth.

The semi-deity Völund, identified explicitly as Lord of the Elves, does not seem to have any particular elfish characteristics himself. He is the archetypal smith, like the Finnish Ilmarinen and the Greek Hephaestus. Many Germanic

heroes, including Beowulf, carry swords said to be forged by Völund (English Weland or Wayland). His adventures on Nidud's island, and his apparent escape by means of hand-wrought wings, are reminiscent of the myth of Daedalus. Icelanders themselves had long ago made this comparison, for the Icelandic word for labyrinth is völu-darhús (Völund's house).

Goddesses generally play a very minor role in the poetry, though in the heroic poems women such as Brunhild and Gudrun play very central roles. Freya is prominent in 'The Lay of Thrym'. She is demanded by Thrym as ransom for Thor's hammer, without which the gods cannot be defended. Freya indignantly refuses to sacrifice her reputation by accompanying Loki to Jötunheim (Land of the Giants), and Thor himself must masquerade as the goddess. Freya is Njörd's daughter and known as a goddess of fertility, equivalent in the Nordic pantheon to Venus. She too is one of the Vanes, who, it seems, were all fertility gods.

Cosmology

In 'The Song of the Sybil' it is said that in the beginning there was nothing but a 'yawning gap'. The Sybil herself, however,

says that she knows of nine worlds, and Vafthrudnir the giant claims that he has seen nine worlds. The poetry refers to the gods' construction of Midgard, and the raising of the temple in Asgard. The term Midgard (Middle World) implies to Snorri a tricentric structure of the universe with Asgard in the center, Midgard about it, and Utgard (Outer World) as the third ring. Utgard, we must assume further, contains Jötunheim (Land of the Giants), Alfheim (Land of the Elves), Svartalfheim (Land of the Dark Elves), and perhaps Vanaheim (Land of the Vanes). Somewhere below this structure is Niflheim, the realm of the goddess Hel. The ninth world may be that of the dwarves, but its proper name and its specific location are uncertain. Asgard, the world of the gods, and Midgard, the world of man, are protected from Utgard by a large body of water in which swims the Midgard-Serpent, so huge that he encircles all Midgard and clasps his tail in his mouth. Asgard and Midgard are connected to each other by a bridge Bifröst (Rainbow) which is said to span the water. It is across this bridge that the enemies of the gods will fare at Ragnarök. The world-ash Yggdrasil has one of its three roots embedded in Asgard, the second in Utgard, and the third in Niflheim. Under the first

root is the spring of Urd (Future, or Fate; Old English Wyrd, Shakespeare's weird as in the weird sisters of Macbeth), under the second is the well of Mimir, Odin's source of wisdom, and under the third is the spring Hvergelmir, source of all rivers. The dragon Nidhögg (Deep-Biter) gnaws at the deepest root, and above four dwarves (North, South, East and West) support the sky. Two wolves pursue the sun and moon, and will catch and swallow them at Ragnarök.

Utgard must be a completely mountainous and cold region. Frost giants, mountain giants and rock elves live there. Jötunheim must be northward from Asgard, since the north is traditionally the land of death and the land of man's enemies. The trolls, presumably, live in the east or northeast, for Thor is frequently described as being 'in the east, fighting trolls'. Hel is also somewhat to the north as well as downward, since Snorri's Gylfaginning tells how Hérmod rode after Baldur to Hel, 'deep and to the north'. To the south lies Muspellheim (the Realm of Fire). It is difficult to say how much the Icelandic concept of Hel was influenced by the mountainous and volcanic character of Iceland, but the dimension of depth is suggested elsewhere in poetic descriptions. In 'The Lay of Grímnir' Odin looks out

over the world from his throne, or high seat, Hlidskjálf (Hall of Many Doors). Frey sees down into Jötunheim from Hlidskjálf in 'Skirnir's Ride'. Whether Odin or any occupant of Hlidskjálf can see over the world just because the seat is high, or because Odin's home has certain magic properties is uncertain. As we are told that the occupant of Hhdskj álf can 'see out over all the worlds', we have placed Asgard on the edge of the universe, rather than in the center (where Snorri seems to place it, cf. pp.164 and 172).

The dramatic situation in each of the mythological poems involves a movement between worlds, and often suggests descents from one plane to another. In 'The Song of the Sybil' Odin has journeyed downward to Niflheim to charm the Sybil into speech. 'The Lay of Vafthruthnir' is a quest into Jötunheim not only to test the giant's wit, but to learn of the impending fate of the gods. 'The Lay of Grímnir' is ostensibly a quest to test human virtue, but it turns into an exposition of Odin's wit, as well as a revelation of his pseudonyms. 'Skirnir's Ride' is Frey's quest for a bride in Jötunheim, and Thor quests for a giant kettle in 'The Lay of Hymir' in which to brew beer for the gods' feast. 'The Lay of Thrym' is a quest to recover from

Jötunheim Thor's hammer. 'Baldur's Dreams' is another of Odin's quests to learn of the fate of the gods. 'Brunhild's Hel-Ride' tells of Brunhild's journey from Midgard to Hel as the Valkyrie seeks to follow her slain lover Sigurd (in Hel rather than in Valhalla because he was slain in bed rather than on the battlefield).

Descent into a lower world in order to acquire secrets of life and death denied living beings is a mythological archetype. Odin parallels heroes of many traditions in this respect - Gilgamesh, Ulysses, Aeneas, and Sir Guyon are but a few. Odin wins his battle of wits in such confrontations with knowers of truth, but generally fails to grasp the significance of the answers he extracts. Not until he questions the Sybil does he receive the full and explicit statement of the gods' fate.

The mythological poems of Icelandic tradition are typologically related to Nordic heroic legends in poetry. The former constitute a kind of mythological explication of the condition of universal life, and the latter illustrate struggles of men within these conditions. What happens in Asgard foreshadows what will come to pass in Midgard. As the gods struggle to prevent a destruction they know is inescapable, so heroes are

implicitly urged to face inevitable fate without succumbing to despair. As the race of gods anticipates resurrection, so the heroes anticipate enduring fame. The typo-logical association between poems of gods and poems of heroes lends them similar structures. The lays of Thrym and Völund illustrate this general correspondence. Each hero, Völund and Thor, is robbed of his most valued possession, without which each feels powerless. To regain his hammer, Thor must allow himself to be disguised as a woman; Völund, before he can regain his sword, is hamstrung. Each must journey to another world before recovering his loss, and, in each instance, recovery takes place during a kind of mock wedding. Völund weds Bodvild (whom he calls his 'bride') by assaulting her. Thor's wedding feast ends with his slaughter of the giants. Both tales echo earlier myths of regeneration.

Despite the frequent journeys of gods to Jötunheim and to Midgard, there is very little mingling of the affairs of mortals with the affairs of gods. For the most part, gods are conspicuously absent in the heroic poems, and mortals are absent from the poems about gods (except for references to men in the prose accompanying the poems). Giants never

appear in Midgard, and when dwarves appear they seem to refer more to stunted humans than to the enemies of gods. Although Valhalla is an important concept in heroic life, there are no poems, other than the contrived 'Lay of Erik', that mention the presence of mortals in Asgard.

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Poems of the Poetic Edda

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/voluspa_f.html" [Völuspá](#)
(Prophecy of the Seeress)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/havamal_f.html" [Hávamál](#) (Words of the High One)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/vafthrudnismal_f.html" [Vafþrúðnismál](#) (The Lay of Vafþrúdnir)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/grimnismal_f.html" [Grímnismál](#) (The Lay of Grímnir)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/skírnismal_f.html" [Skírnismál](#) (The Lay of Skírnir)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/harbardsljod_f.html" [Hárbarðsljóð](#) (The Lay of Harbard)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/hymiskvida_f.html"[**Hymiskviða**](#) (The Song of Hymir)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/lokasenna_f.html"[**Lokasenna**](#) (The Flyting of Loki)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/thrymskvida_f.html"[**Þrymskviða**](#) (The Lay of Thrym)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/volundarkvida_f.html"[**Völundarkviða**](#) (The Lay of Volund)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/alvissmal_f.html"[**Alvíssmál**](#) (The Words of All-Wise)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/vegtamskvida_f.html"[**Vegtamskviða / Baldrs Draumr**](#)
(Baldr's Dreams)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/rigsthula_f.html"[**Rígsþula**](#) (The Lay of Rig)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/helgi_hjorvardhsson_f.html"[**Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar**](#)
(The Lay of Helgi Hjorvard's son)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/hundingsbana_fyrri_f.html"[**Helgakviða Hundingsbana I**](#)
(The Lay of Helgi bane of the Hundings)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/volsungakvida_forna_f.html" **[Völsungakviða in Forna / Helgakviða Hundingsbana II](#)** (The Old Lay of the Volsungs)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/dauda_sinfjotli_f.html" **[Frá Dauda Sinfjötla](#)** (On the Death of Sinfjolti)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/gripisspa_f.html" **[Grípisspá](#)** (The Spae of Gripir)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/reginsmal_f.html" **[Reginismál](#)** (The Words of Reginn)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/fafnismal_f.html" **[Fáfnismál](#)** (The Words of Fafnir)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/sigdrifumal_f.html" **[Sigurdrífumál](#)** (The Words of Sigurdrifa)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/gudrunarkvida_fyrsta_f.html" **[Guðrúnarkviða I](#)** (The First Lay of Gudrun)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/sigurdarkvida_skamma_f.html" **[Sigurdarkviða in Skamma](#)**

(The Short Lay of Sigurd)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/

helreid_bryndhildar_f.html"[**Helreið Brynhildar**](#)

(Brynhild's Ride to Hel)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/

gudrunarkvida_forna_f.html"[**Guðrúnarkvida II**](#) **(The Second**

Lay of Gudrun)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/

gudrunarkvida_thridja_f.html"[**Guðrúnarkvida III**](#) **(The Third**

Lay of Gudrun)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/

oddrunarkvida_f.html"[**Oddrúnarkviða**](#) **(Oddun's Lament)**

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/atlakvida_f.html"

[Atlakviða**](#)**

(The Lay of Atli)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/

atlamal_graenlenzku_f.html"[**Atlamál in Grænlensku**](#) **(The**

Greenlandish Words of Atli)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/

gudrunarhvot_f.html"[**Guðrúnarhvöt**](#) **(Gudrun's Lament)**

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/

hamdismal_f.html"[**Hamðismál in Fornu**](#) **(The Ancient Lay**

of Hamdir)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/
forsbjallsod_f.html" [Forsbjallsóð / Hrafnagaldur Óðins](#)
(Odin's raven-spell)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/
hyndluljod_f.html" [Hyndluljóð](#) (including Völuspá in
skamma)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/
grottasongr_f.html" [Gróttasöngur](#) (The Mill-Song)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/
grogaldur_f.html" [Grógaldur](#) (The Spell of Groa)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/
fjolsvinnsma_l_f.html" [Fjölsvinnsmál](#) (The Lay of Fjölsvith)

HYPERLINK "../lore/poetic_edda/
solarljod_f.html" [Sólarljóð](#) (The Song of the Sun)

-CHAPTER SIXTEEN-

SNORRI'S EDDA

Also known as the Prose Edda, *Edda* (as it is known in Old Norse) was written by the icelandic scholar, poet, cleric, and politician Snorri Sturluson. While the level of his commitment to Christianity remains the subject of some debate to this day, and his chief intent with this work was the preservation of skaldic poetry as an art (hence the explanation of the mythological allusions, whose understanding is vital to skaldic poetry), there can be no doubt that he was personally responsible for the preservation of an enormous amount of Heiðinn Lore which would otherwise have been lost to us. (He is also the author of Heimskringla, the history of the Norse kings, which also contains invaluable information for the Heiðinn scholar.)

Prologus (Prologue): In HYPERLINK "../lore/snorra_edda/prologus/norse.html"[Old Norse](#), HYPERLINK "../lore/snorra_edda/prologus/english.html"[English](#), or HYPERLINK "../lore/snorra_edda/prologus/facing.html"[side-by-side](#)

Gylfaginning (The Deluding of Gylfi): In HYPERLINK "../lore/snorra_edda/gylfaginning.html"[Gylfaginning](#)

lore/snorra_edda/gylfaginning_n.html"[Old Norse](#),
HYPERLINK "../lore/snorra_edda/
gylfaginning_e.html"[English](#), or HYPERLINK "../lore/
snorra_edda/gylfaginning_f.html"[side-by-side](#)

Skáldskaparmál (Poetic Diction): In HYPERLINK "../lore/
snorra_edda/skaldskaparmal/norse.html"[Old Norse](#) or
HYPERLINK "../lore/snorra_edda/skaldskaparmal/
english.htm"[English](#)

Háttatal (Tally of Meters): In HYPERLINK "../lore/
snorra_edda/hattatal_n.html"[Old Norse](#).

-CHAPTER SEVENTEEN-

GESTA DANORUM

PRIVATE "TYPE=PICT;ALT=Saxo Grammaticus at work"

The Gesta Danorum ("History of the Danes") was composed by the scholar and cleric Saxo Grammaticus ("Saxo the Learned"). Although there are actually 16 books in the work, only the first nine have been translated into English in a public-domain edition. The first nine books are of primary interest to students of Norse mythology, however, as they deal with the legendary period of Danish history, and many of the mythical accounts in other sources may be found here (often in variant forms and with altered names), making this work an invaluable tool for comparative research.

Preface in [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/](#)

[book0e.html"English](#), [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/](#)

[book0l.html"Latin](#), or [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/](#)

[book0f.html"side-by-side](#)

Book I in [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/](#)

[book1e.html"English](#), [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/](#)

[book1l.html"Latin](#), or [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/](#)

book1f.html"[side-by-side](#)

Book II in HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book2e.html"[English](#), HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book2l.html"[Latin](#), or HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book2f.htm"[side-by-side](#)

Book III in HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book3e.html"[English](#), HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book3l.html"[Latin](#), or HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book3f.html"[side-by-side](#)

Book IV in HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book4e.html"[English](#), HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book4l.html"[Latin](#), or HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book4f.html"[side-by-side](#)

Book V in HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book5e.html"[English](#), HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book5l.html"[Latin](#), or HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book5f.html"[side-by-side](#)

Book VI in HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book6e.html"[English](#), HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book6l.html"[Latin](#), or HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/

book6f.html"[side-by-side](#)

Book VII in [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/
book7e.html"English](#), [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/
book7l.html"Latin](#), or [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/
book7f.html"side-by-side](#)

Book VIII in [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/
book8e.html"English](#), [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/
book8l.html"Latin](#), or [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/
book8f.html"side-by-side](#)

Book IV in [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/
book9e.html"English](#), [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/
book9l.html"Latin](#), or [HYPERLINK "../lore/saxo/
book9f.html"side-by-side](#)

-CHAPTER EIGHTEEN- THE ICELANDIC SAGAS

Written some generations after the conversion of Iceland to Christianity, the Icelandic sagas are nonetheless an invaluable source of information, not only concerning Heiðinn religious practices, but also concerning the social, political, and other customs of the era. Of course, given the span of time, care must be taken to identify those details which are obviously later inventions or distortions, but it is certainly possible to divide the wheat from such chaff.

HYPERLINK "../lore/sagas/njal/index.html" [**Brennu-Njáls saga \(The saga of burnt Njál\)**](#)

HYPERLINK "../lore/sagas/egil/norse.html" [**Egil's Saga**](#)

HYPERLINK "../lore/sagas/eirik_the_red/index.html" [**Eiríks saga Rauða \(Eric the Red's saga\)**](#)

HYPERLINK "../lore/sagas/eyrbyggja/index.html" [**Eyrbyggja saga \(The saga of the ere-dwellers\)**](#)

HYPERLINK "../lore/sagas/grettir/index.html" [**Grettirs Saga \(The saga of Grettir the Strong\)**](#)

HYPERLINK "../lore/sagas/heidarviga/

index.html" [Heiðarvíga saga \(The saga of the heath-slayings\)](#).

HYPERLINK "../lore/sagas/kormak/index.html" [Kormaks saga \(The life and death of Cormak the skald\)](#)

HYPERLINK "../lore/sagas/laxdaela/index.html" [Laxdæla saga \(The saga of the men of Salmon-River dale\)](#)

HYPERLINK "../lore/sagas/volsungs/index.html" [Völsunga saga \(The saga of the Völsungs\)](#)

-CHAPTER NINETEEN-

BEOWULF

Beowulf was written by an unknown author, sometime around the 9th century CE. Although written in Anglo-Saxon, the story is Scandinavian in setting, and yields tremendous insights into religious customs. It is probably the single best source of information for one of the most important Heiðni ceremonies; the sumbel.

HYPERLINK "../lore/beowulf/facing.html"[Click here](#) to see the original Anglo-Saxon and an English translation side-by-side.

-CHAPTER TWENTY-

HEIMSKRINGLA

Heimskringla is Snorri Sturluson's history of the kings of Norway. It takes the history of the royal Norweigan line all the way from Odin Himself (albeit a euherimization) down through Magnus Erlingson. It is of significance not only because of the historical information it contains, but also because of the wealth of details concerning Heathen religious and social custom. Most of such details are recorded quite incidentally, rather than as a central part of the story, and can thus be fairly well regarded as accurate. Indeed, many such details are not only confirmed, but also expanded upon, in other sources.

HYPERLINK "[../lore/heimskringla/preface/index.html](http://lore/heimskringla/preface/index.html)"**Preface of Snorri Sturluson** in old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "[../lore/heimskringla/ynglings/index.html](http://lore/heimskringla/ynglings/index.html)"**Ynglinga saga (The story of the Ynglings)** in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "[../lore/heimskringla/halfdan_black/](http://lore/heimskringla/halfdan_black/)

index.html"[Hálfðanar saga svarta \(Halfdan the Black's saga\)](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/harald_harfager/

index.html"[Haraldar saga hárfagra \(Harald Harfager's saga\)](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/hakon_foster/

index.html"[Hákonar saga Aðalsteinsfóstra \(The saga of Hakon the foster-son of Athelstan\)](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/harald_grafels/

index.html"[Haralds saga gráfeldar \(The saga of Harald Grafels\)](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/olaf_tryggvason/

index.html"[Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar \(Olaf Trygvason's Saga\)](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/olaf_saint/

index.html"[Ólafs saga helga \(The saga of Olaf the Saint\)](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/magnus_good/

index.html"[Magnúss saga góða \(The saga of Magnus the Good\)](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/harald_sigurdson/index.html"[**Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar \(Saga of Harald Sigurdson\)**](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/olaf_kyrre/index.html"[**Ólafs saga kyrra \(The saga of Olaf Kyrre\)**](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/magnus_barefoot/index.html"[**Magnúss saga berfætts \(Magnus Barefoot's Saga\)**](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/king_inge/index.html"[**Magnússona saga \(The saga of the sons of Magnus\)**](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/magnus_blind_harald_gille/index.html"[**Magnúss saga blinda og Haralds gilla \(The saga of Magnus the Blind and Harald Gille\)**](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/king_inge/index.html"[**Saga Inga konungs og bræðra hans \(The saga of King Inge and his brothers\)**](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/hakon_herdebreid/"

index.html"[Hákonar saga herðibreiðs \(The saga of Hakon the Broad-Shouldered\)](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK "../lore/heimskringla/magnus_erlingson/index.html"[Magnúss saga Erlingssonar \(Magnus Erlingson's Saga\)](#) in Old Norse, with facing English translation.

-CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE- OTHER SOURCES

There are literally hundreds of other sources for Norse religion, history, and society which could collectively be put under the heading of the Lore. Many of these are ecclesiastical accounts, and thus care must be taken to identify Christianizations and outright distortions. But even such sources can prove to be invaluable, especially when they forbid specific practices as "pagan".

HYPERLINK "../lore/other/runes/norwegian.html"[The Norwegian Rune Poem](#) in Old Norse with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK ["/lore/other/runes/icelandic.html"](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/lore/other/runes/icelandic.html) **[The Old Icelandic Rune Rhyme](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/lore/other/runes/icelandic.html)** in Old Norse with facing English translation.

Abbo of Fleury: The Martyrdom of St. Edmund, King of East Anglia, 870. Available in HYPERLINK ["http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/870abbo-edmund.html"](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/870abbo-edmund.html) **[English translation](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/870abbo-edmund.html)** by Prof. Kenneth Cutler (1998). *Off-site.*

Annals of Xanten, 845 - 853. Available in HYPERLINK ["http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/xanten1.html"](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/xanten1.html) **[English translation](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/xanten1.html)**. *Off-site.*

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Available in HYPERLINK ["http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Anglo/"](http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Anglo/) **[English translation](http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Anglo/)** by Rev. James Ingram (London, 1823). *Off-site.*

HYPERLINK ["/lore/other/runes/anglo-saxon.html"](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/lore/other/runes/anglo-saxon.html) **[The Anglo-Saxon Rune Rhyme](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/lore/other/runes/anglo-saxon.html)** in Anglo-Saxon with facing English translation.

HYPERLINK ["/lore/other/bayeux_tapestry/index.html"](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/lore/other/bayeux_tapestry/index.html) **[The Bayeux Tapestry](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/lore/other/bayeux_tapestry/index.html)**.

HYPERLINK ["/lore/other/capitulary_saxony.html"](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/lore/other/capitulary_saxony.html) **[Charlemagne's Capitulary for](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/lore/other/capitulary_saxony.html)**

[Saxony](#) in English. This piece is particularly interesting, because it lists several "pagan" practices (such as cremation) which were explicitly denounced as illegal and punishable by death.

HYPERLINK "[../lore/other/risala.html](#)**"**[Ibn Fadlan's Risala](#) in English.

HYPERLINK "[../lore/other/jordanes.html](#)**"**[Jordanes' Origins and Deeds of the Goths](#) in English.

HYPERLINK "[../lore/other/alfred.html](#)**"**[The Life of Alfred the Great](#) in English

Nibelungenleid. Available in **HYPERLINK "http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/north/nblng.htm"**[English translation](#) by Daniel B. Shumway (Houghton-Mifflin Co., New York, 1909). *Off-site.*

Tactitus' Germania. Available in **HYPERLINK "http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/tacitus-germ-latin.html"**[Latin](#) or **HYPERLINK "http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/tacitus-germanygord.html"**[English translation](#) by Thomas Gordon. *Off-site.*

Three Sources on the Ravages of the Northmen in Frankland, c. 843 - 912. Available in **HYPERLINK "http://**

www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/843bertin.html"[English translation](#). *Off-site*.

Viking and Hungarian Raiders, 883 - c. 950. Available in
HYPERLINK "http://www.hillsdale.edu/dept/History/
Documents/War/Med/883-Raiders.htm"[English translation](#).
Off-site.

-APPENDIX I- WORD-HOARD

KEY:

(ON) Old Norse

(AS) Anglo-Saxon

PRIVATE "TYPE=PICT;ALT=knotwork.gif (2756
bytes)"INCLUDEPICTURE \d "../images/knotwork.gif"

Æsir (ON) "Gods". The term *Æsir* refers both to all the Gods who dwell in Asgard as a whole, as well as the specific group of Gods who contended with the Vanir early in the history of the world. At the conclusion of the war, both sides sent hostages to live with the other; thus, when speaking of the *Æsir*, one is also speaking of the Vanic Gods (Freyja, Freyr, Njord) that dwell with them.

Alþing (ON) "general assembly". In Iceland, the annual alþing was the chief legal, political, and social gathering of the year. It is because of the authority of the alþing that Iceland is usually credited with creating the world's first functioning parliament. Only the goðar could vote on matters at the alþing, but men of all classes would attend because of its central social and

economic importance.

Ár ok friðr (ON) "good harvest and peace". Central to the notion of a well-balanced Norse society was the idea that material prosperity and peace would be the by-product of a well-balanced social order. Sacral kings, such as those found in Denmark and Sweden especially, who failed to produce such were sometimes offered to the Gods as a sacrifice.

Baugr (ON) "wergeld". Money paid in recompense for an injury or death of a kinsman.

Blót (ON) "sacrifice". An offering to the Gods; often the blood of a sacrificial animal (the meat of which is then eaten), but sometimes valuables, food, and so forth.

Blótveitsla (ON) "sacrificial feast". The feast following a sacrifice, consisting of the meat of the sacrificial animal.

Drengkapr (ON) "high-mindedness". A sense of duty and the desire to do the right thing.

Dulareiðr (ON) "oath of denial". An oath sworn in support of a defendant in a legal case, declaring the individual innocent of the crime.

Einvigi (ON) "duel". An informal and often impromptu duel, using whatever weapons are at hand.

Eið (ON) "oath". Oaths are often formally taken on oath-rings or during sumbel, and were considered inviolable. To go against a sworn oath is to go against the foundations of one's *wyrd*.

Galdr (ON) "magic song". A magical incantation, sung and often consisting of rune-names and -sounds in particular order.

Goði (fem. *gyðja*) (ON) "priest, chieftain". In the Viking age, the *goðar* were those who arranged large public religious and non-religious celebrations. Usually they were prominent and wealthy individuals who could afford to put on such large feasts on a regular basis. In Iceland, their political authority was codified and they constituted the ruling class, who could vote on matters at the Alþing. Today, their role is much the same; they tend to the administration of religious festivals as well as the more secular duties of representing the interests of *Heiðinjar* at the regional and national levels.

Góðgjarnir menn (ON) "men of good deeds". Men who act out of a sense of *drengkapr*. See also *góðviljamenn*.

Góðviljamenn (ON) "men of goodwill". Men who act out of a sense of *drengkapr*. See also *góðgjarnir menn*.

Görd (ON) "arbitration". The settlement of disputes between

individuals or groups by a neutral and disinterested third party. Such settlements can be made either informally or during the process of a suit in the courts.

Gørningar (ON) "magics". A collective term referring to various form of magical practices; galdr, seiðr, spá, and so forth.

Heill ver þu (ON) "be you well". A greeting.

Heilsan (ON) "hail". A greeting.

Holmganga (ON) "duel". A very formalized duel fought by strict rules, used to settle disputes.

Kunnátta (ON) "magical lore". The knowledge and lore of magical practices such as galdr, seiðr, spá, and so forth.

Níðing (ON) "evil wretch". One who has committed a crime irredemable by *baugr*.

Niðvisur (ON) "insulting songs". Insulting verses, usually composed to mock some individual. They are considered just cause for retribution.

Seiðr (ON) "sorcery". A form of magical practice somewhat akin to Siberian and Amerindian shamanism.

Siðr (ON) "custom", "religion". Used in contemporary Heiðni to refer to those social institutions that guide interpersonal

interaction such as feud, vengeance, and arbitration.

Skiljum heilir (ON) "part we whole". A farewell.

Skógar-man (ON) "forest man". An outlaw; one who is beyond the protection of the law, and who is shunned by society. See also *varg i véum*.

Spá (ON) "prophecy". The art of predicting the future through magical means.

Sæmd (ON) "honorable compensation". A fee, usually paid in connection with the arbitration of a dispute. See also *görd*.

Þing (ON) "assembly". In both Scandinavia and Iceland, decisions were usually made collectively at the various local þings, which functioned as combinations of law courts, political assemblies, and social gatherings. The power of the þings varied from place to place and time to time, but were known to have the right to elect kings. Monarchs would disregard the decisions made at þing at their peril.

Trenið (ON) "carved insults". Written insults, which are worthy of outlawry if proven. See also *tungunið*.

Tungunið (ON) "spoken derision". Verbal insults, which are worthy of outlawry if proven. See also *trenið*.

Varg i véum (ON) "wolf in the sanctuary". An outlaw; one who

is beyond the protection of the law, and who is shunned by society. See also *skógar-man*.

Vinátta (ON) "friendship". A formal (but not necessarily public) arrangement of friendship between two people, more often reflecting genuine affection. See also *vinfengi*.

Vinfengi (ON) "friendship". A formal (but not necessarily public) arrangement of friendship between two people, more often for convenience and practicality. See also *vinátta*.

Wes thu hal (AS) "be you whole". Both a greeting and a farewell.

-APPENDIX II-

HISTORICAL TIMELINE

PRIVATE793 Norse raid and plunder monastery on isle of Lindisfarne. The "Viking Era" begins. 794 Norse raid Jarrow in Northumbria. 795 First Norse raids on Scotland and Ireland. 799 Norse raid Aquitaine. 105 Norsemen killed by locals after their ships are blown off-course in northern Aquitaine. 800 Frankish King Charles the Great (Charlemagne) organizes defenses against

Norse raids. 808 King Godfred King of Denmark
 sacks Slavic town of Reric; merchants moved to Hedeby. King
 Godfred of Denmark repairs and extends the Danevirke against
 possible Frankish aggression. 809 Papal legate
 captured by Norsemen in the North Sea while en route to
 Northumbria. 810 King Godfred of Denmark raids
 Frisia, is later killed. 820 Norse fleet is twice driven off
 by Franks before penetrating Aquitaine. 823-824
 Archbishop Ebo of Reims undertakes missionary work in
 Denmark. ~825 Danes begin minting coinage at Hedeby.
 Irish monks are driven out of the Faeroe Islands. 829
 -830 Anagar undertakes missionary work in Svearland
 (Sweden), at Birka. 832 Norse raid Armagh three times
 in a single month. 834-837 Norse raid Dorestad every
 year. 837 Norse raid Frankish fort at Walcheren and slay
 or capture most of the Emperor's closest advisors. 839
 Svear (Swedes) reach Constantiople. 839-840 Norse
 raiders winter in Ireland for the first time. 840 Armagh
 (center of the Irish church) is sacked three times. 841
 Town of Dublin established by Norse. King Lothar grants
 province of Walcheren to Harald Klak. 842 Norse

winter in France for the first time. 843 Norse attack Nantes. 843-885 Frisia under intermittent Danish rule. 844 Norse raid Spain for the first time, are driven off with heavy losses. King Raedwulf of Northumbria killed by Norsemen. Norsemen sack Lisbon. Norsemen sack Seville, but are defeated five weeks later by the Muslims and retreat. 845 Norse sack Hamburg and Paris; Franks pay first weregeld to Norse raiders. Turgeis is captured by King Mael Seachlainn of Meath and drowned in Lough Owel. 847 King Mael Seachlainn of Meath defeats Norse army south of Slane. 849 Irish sack Dublin. 850 Anagar builds first Christian churches at Ribe and Hedeby. Norse raiders winter in England for the first time. Norsemen defeated by Anglo-Saxons in naval battle off the coast of Sandwich. King Lothar grants province of Frisia to Roric. 851 Danes take Dublin. 852-854 Anagar undertakes missionary work in Svearland (Sweden). 853 Norse Kingdom of Dublin founded as Olaf and Ivar (from Norway) drive the Danes from the town. 854 Danish King Horik killed in civil war. Muslims capture two Norse ships off the coast of Cordoba. 858 Charles the Bald besieges Vikings on the isle of

Oissel, but the seige is lifted when his kingdom is invaded by his brother King Lothar. 859 Norsemen raid Algericas, burn mosque. 859-860 Vikings winter in the Camargue (southern France). 859-862 Norse raid Mediterranean lands, led by Bjorn Ironsides and Hastein.

860 Gardar the Swede mounts exploration of Iceland. Rus attack Constantinople. Hastein and Bjorn attack the Loire. Norsemen sack Luna, Italy. King Charles the Bald hires Weland to fight Norsemen on his behalf; he beseiges Norse forces on the Isle of Oissel-- they pay 6,000 pounds of silver as ransom; Weland is finally defeated by Anglo-Saxons at battle of Winchester. Gardar sights Iceland for the first time.

861 Muslim fleet defeats Norse fleet outside the Straights of Gibraltar while en route home. 862 Frankish King Charles (the Bald) fortifies rivers against Norse raiders. Rurik becomes King of Novgorod. Kiev is captured by Askold and Dir. 864 Count of Auvergne defeated and slain at the battle of Clermont. Rus sack Abasgun. 865 Great Army of the Danes invades England; East Anglia obtains peace by supplying horses to the Danes. 866 Norsemen rout Frankish army on the Seine River; King Charles the Bald pays

them 4,000 pounds of silver to leave; they disperse to England and Frisia. Danes capture York. 867 Northumbrians

attempt to recapture York, but are driven off. Mercians and West Saxons besiege the Danish camp at Nottingham, but the siege fails. 869 King Edmund of East Anglia is

killed and slain at the battle of Hoxne. Norse under the command of Kjarval defeat Irish fleet off the Hebrides.

870 Initial Norse settlement of Iceland begins; a handful of Irish monks are driven out. Earldom of Orkney established.

Danes capture East Anglia. Norse from Dublin destroy the capital of Strathclyde. 871 Alfred becomes King of

Wessex. 873 King Charles of the Franks drives Norsemen from Angers. Danish Great Army captures Repton.

874 Danish Great Army divides into two sections.

874-914 "Forty Years Rest" in Ireland. 875 Halfdan driven from Dublin by Norwegians. 876 Danish

settlement of England begins. Halfdan sets up the Norse Kingdom of York. 877 Halfdan of York killed by

Norwegians while trying to conquer Dublin. 878 King Alfred of Wessex defeats the Danes under Guthrum at the battle of Eddington; the Danes agree to withdraw from Wessex.

The Treaty of Wedmore establishes the Danelaw. 882
Novgorod and Kiev are united under Oleg. Franks defeated at
the battle of Ascloha. 884 Forces under Sigfrid are
paid 12,000 lbs. of silver to leave Amiens. 885 Harald
Finehair wins battle of Hafrsfjord; begins unification of
Norway. Norse begin Siege of Paris. Norse attack on Rochester
is driven off by King Alfred of Wessex. Sigfrid's fleet arrives at
the Seine. 886 King Alfred of Wessex recaptures London
from the Danes. Siege of Paris ends as King Charles of the
Franks allows them to pass upriver and ravage the countryside.
888 King Odo of the Franks defeats the Norse at the
battle of Montfaucon. Norse at Chezy are paid Danegeld and
begin to retreat from the Seine valley. 891 Arnulf
defeats Norse at battle of the Dyle. 893 Norse
unsuccessfully beseige Pilton and Exeter. Danish camp at
Buttington is beseiged; Danes break out and retreat to East
Anglia. Chester is captured by the Danes, who must move into
Wales to replace their destroyed food stores. 895
Rollo arrives in Normandy. 896 Danish army in
Mercia and Wessex disperses to East Anglia and Frankia.
899 King Alfred of Wessex dies. ~900 Harald Finehair

completes unification of most of Norway. Norse begin
settlement of northwest England. 902 Norse driven
out of Dublin. West Saxons begin attack against the Danelaw.

907 Constantinople attacked by the Rus under Prince
Oleg of Kiev. 910 16 Rus ships attack and pillage the
Persian coast along the Caspian Sea. 911 Rollo founds
Duchy of Normandy. Rollo unsuccessfully besieges Chartres.
Rus and Byzantium sign treaty. 912-913 Rus raiders
active in Caspian Sea. 913 Rus fleet is ambushed and
destroyed by Khazars at the battle of Itil. 914 Norse
conquer Brittany. 917 Norse recapture Dublin.
Danish defeated at Tempsford; king and garrison are slain.
Danes unsuccessfully attack Towcester and Wiggamere.
Aethelfaed King of Mercia captures Derby from the Danes.
918 Ragnold defeats Northumbrians and Scots at the
battle of Corbridge. 919 Rognold captures York. High
King of Tara and twelve lesser kings are killed trying to drive
the Norse from Dublin. Nantes made capital of Norse lands in
Brittany. 922 Arab merchant Ibn Fadlan meets Rus
slave traders. 924 Norse from Dublin attack Norse at
Limerick, but are defeated. 927 King Athelstan of

Wessex captures York, driving out Guthfrith. King Athelstan is recognized as supreme by Scots, Stathyclyde Britons, and Northumbrians. 930 Alping established in Iceland. First sighting of Greenland by Gunnborn. 934 German King Heinrich (the Fowler) defeats Danes. 936 Duke Alan Barbertorte of Brittany invades Brittany to expel the Norse invaders; captures a party of Norsemen at a wedding at Dol and kills them; defeats Norse at the battle of Peran. 937 Norse-Scottish army under Olaf Guthfrithsson defeated by English under King Athelstan of Wessex at the battle of Brunanburh. King Olaf Sihtricsson of Dublin destroys fleet belonging to Norse of Limerick at Lake Ree. Norse are expelled from Brittany. 939 Olaf Guthfrithsson recaptures Kingdom of York. 940 King Edmund of Wessex cedes Five Boroughs to Olaf. 941 Rus unsuccessfully attack Constantinople under Igor and make treaty. King Muirchertach of northern Ui Néill, attacks the Hebrides in reprisal for Norse raids. 942 King Edmund of Wessex retakes the Five Boroughs. Norse settlers in Normandy begin pagan revival. 943 Rus capture Barda from Muslims, but retreat after an epidemic breaks out.

944 English recapture Kingdom of York. 948
 Bishoprics established at Ribe, Hedeby, and Aarhus. Erik
 Bloodaxe captures Kingdom of York, becomes King.
 954 West Saxons conquer the Danelaw. Erik Bloodaxe killed
 at the battle of Stainmore. Final end of the Norse Kingdom of
 York. 958 Gorm the Old dies. 960 Danish
 control over Norway reestablished by Harald Bluetooth. Scots
 attempt to recapture Caithness, but are defeated. 964
 -971 Svyatoslav wars with Bulgars, Khazars, and Byzantines.
 ~965 Danes converted to Christianity by Harald
 Bluetooth. 968 Danevirk fortified against German
 aggression. King Mathghamain of Dal Cais conquers Limerick.
 969 Norse recapture Limerick. ~970 Town of
 Sigtuna founded. 974-981 Germans occupy Hedeby.
 980 Norse raids on England begin again. Varangian
 Guard formed at Constantinople. Dublin pays tribute to King
 Máel Sechnaill of Meath. 983 Erik the Red makes first
 voyage to Greenland. 985 First sighting of Vinland
 (North America) by Bjarni Herjolfsson. 986 Beginning
 of the settlement of Greenland by Erik the Red. 988
 Prince Vladimir of Kiev converts to Christianity. Bishopric

established at Odense. 989 Dublin pays tribute to
 King Máel Sechnaill of Meath. 991 Olaf Tryggvason
 defeats English at the battle of Maldon. Norse defeat
 ealdorman Byrhtnoth in East Anglica. 993 Danes
 attack London, but are driven off with heavy losses. 994
 Olaf and Svein receive 16,000 lbs. of silver as Danegeld. King
 Æthelræd of England baptises Olaf. 995 Norway united
 under Olaf Tryggvason. Olaf Skötkonung first King of both
 Götar and Svear. Dublin pays tribute to King Máel Sechnaill of
 Meath. 997 Danes attack southern Wales and western
 Wessex. 998-999 Danes set up base on the Isle of
 Wight, begin raiding Sussex and Hampshire. 999
 Dublin pays tribute to King Brian Boru of Munster. 1000
 Iceland converts to Christianity. First explorations of Vinland
 begin under Leif Eriksson. King Æthelræd of England attacks
 the Isle of Man in reprisal for Norse raids. 1001 Danes
 attack southern Wessex, defeating the Saxons at Pinhoe and
 Dean. 1002 Svein Forkbeard attacks England from
 Normandy. 1007 Svein Forkbeard defeats Saxons at
 the battle of East Kennet, continues his march to the sea.
 1009 English fleet divided by dissention, Danes land at

Sandwich unopposed. Danes under Thorkell raids Hampshire,
 Sussex, and Berkshire. 1010 Danes under Thorkell raid
 East Anglia and Mercia. 1013 Norse army fights under
 King Richard II of England against the Count of Chartres.
 Svein Forkbeard conquers Northumbria, Winchester, London,
 the Five Burroughs, and the West Country. King Æthelræd of
 England flees to Normandy. 1014 Leinster and Norse
 army is defeated by King Brian Boru of Munster at the battle
 of Contarf; Jarl Sigurd and King Brodir of Man are killed.
 Svein Forkbeard dies, and King Æthelræd of England returns.
 Last Norse attack on Brittany. 1015 Norway conquered
 by Olaf Haraldsson. 1016 Danes attack London, but are
 driven off. 1016-1035 Cnut is King of England.
 1030 Olaf Haraldsson killed at the battle of Stiklestad. Jarl
 Thorfin of Orkney gains control over most of northern
 Scotland at the battle of Tarbet Ness. 1035 Scots attempt
 to retake northern Scotland, but are defeated by Jarl Thorfin.
 1041 Ingvar the Widefarer travels in Serkland, attempts to
 re-open trade routes; he is killed somewhere in central Asia.
 1042 Danish rule ends in England. 1043 Wends
 defeated by Magnus the Good at the battle of Lyrskov Heath.

1045 Last attack on Constantinople by the Rus.

1047-1067 War between Harald Hardrada of Norway and Svein Estrithson of Denmark. ~1050 Bishopric established in Orkney. 1066 Harald Hardrada killed at the battle of Stamford Bridge. William the Conquerer wins the battle of Hastings. 1069 Svein Estrithson invades England. 1071 Norman Kingdom of Sicily established.

1075 Last Danish invasion of England; Danes sack York.

1079 Godred Crovan unites the Isle of Man and the Hebrides at the battle of Skyhill. 1085 First grant of land to Christian church in Scandinavia. Cnut IV abandons planned invasion of England. 1095 King Malcolm Canmore of Scotland recognizes Norweigan control over the Hebrides. 1098 King Magnus Barelegs of Norway takes over the Kingdom of Man and the Hebrides. 1104 King Magnus Barelegs of Norway killed while raiding Ulster.

-APPENDIX III-

MISSERITAL:

TIMEKEEPING AND CALENDAR RECKONING

The Year

The Norse conception of the year was originally divided into two *misserum* (half-years, sing. *misseri*); *sumar* (summer) and *vetr* (winter). As has been discussed elsewhere, there were deeper concepts of activity/travel being connected with summer (when people would naturally be occupied with trade, warfare, farming and herding, etc.), and inactivity/homebodiness during the winter (when the climate made long travel a risky proposition at best). Sumar would begin on whatever Thursday occurred between April 9th - 15th, while vetr begins on the Thursday between October 11th - 18th.

PRIVATENorse Name	Meaning	Modern Dates
<i>harpa</i>	harp-month	mid-April through May
<i>stekktið</i>	lamb-fold time	mid-May through June
<i>sólmánuður</i>	Sun-month	mid-June through July
<i>miðsumar</i>	Midsummer	mid-July through August

heyannir hay-time mid-August through September
haustmánuður harvest month mid-September through
 October *gormánuður* slaughtering-month mid-
 October through November *ýlir* howling-month(?)
 mid-November through December *hrútmánuður* ram-
 month mid-December through January *þorri*
 mid-January through February *gói* mid-February
 through March *einmánuður* last month of winter mid-
 March through April

Days of the Week

The Germanic origins of our modern names for the days of the week is well-known. The Norse also followed a system of naming days after their deities, which correspond to those names we still use today:

PRIVATENorse Name	Meaning	Modern Name
<i>Sunnudagr</i>	Sunna's day	Sunday
<i>Mánadagr</i>	Máni's day	Monday
<i>Týsdagr</i>	Tyr's day	Tuesday
<i>Óðinsdagr</i>	Óðinn's day	Wednesday
<i>Þórsdagr</i>	Thórr's day	Thursday
<i>Frjádagr</i>	Freyja's day	Friday
<i>Laugardagr</i>	Washing day	Saturday

Hours of the Day

The Heathen day is not divided into 24 hours of 60 minutes

each; that was an innovation popularized by the Christian scholar Bede. Rather, the Heathen day (*sólarhringr*, or sun-ring) was divided into eight equal segments called *áttir* (eighths). Each átt is marked by the position of the sun over a particular geographical feature such as mountains and hills, called a *dagmark* (day-mark). When the sun was over the appropriate marker, we know that the appointed átt has arrived. Many names for hills named for the dagmarkr survive to this day.

PRIVATE Norse Name Meaning Modern Time (approx.)

<i>náttmál</i>	night-measure	9:00 pm	<i>miðnætti</i>
midnight	12:00 am	<i>ótta</i>	time before daybreak
3:00 am	<i>miðr morgun</i>	mid-morning	6:00 am
<i>dagmál</i>	day-measure	9:00 am	<i>hádegi, middag</i>
high day, midday	12:00 pm	<i>undorn</i>	3:00 pm
<i>miðr aptann</i>	mid-evening	6:00 pm	When the sun
is midway between two dagmarkr, it is said to be <i>jafn nærri bá</i>			
<i>ðu</i> ("evenly near both") them; just as we might say "half past			
two", in the Norse reckoning one would say <i>jafn nærri bá ðu</i>			
<i>miðr aptann ok náttmál</i> for halfway between mid-evening and			
night-measure.			

